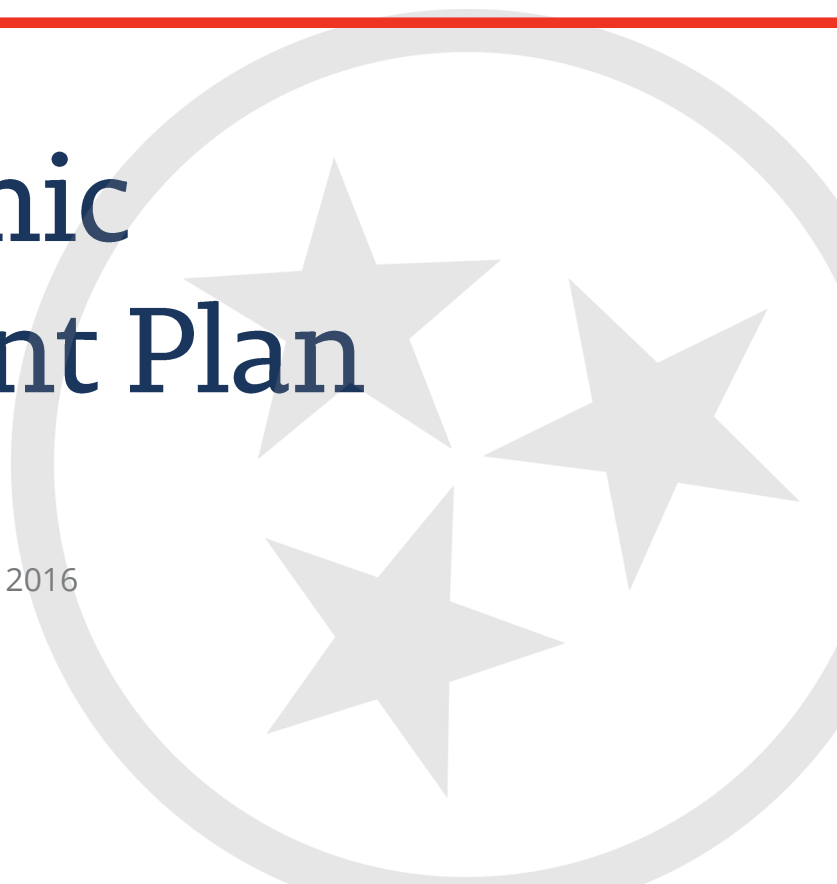




# State Systemic Improvement Plan

## Phase II

Tennessee Department of Education | April 2016



# Executive Summary

In Phase I of the State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP), the Tennessee Department of Education completed comprehensive data analyses, assessed internal infrastructure, and sought broad stakeholder feedback to determine a State-identified Measurable Result (SiMR). Based on this work, the following SiMR was identified: increase by three percent annually the percent of students with a specific learning disability (SLD) in grades 3-8 scoring at or above basic on the English language Arts (ELA) statewide assessment.

In Phase II, the department has identified a detailed implementation plan to exact the desired change specified in the SiMR. Three primary components have been addressed to ensure the success of the SSIP:

- Infrastructure development
  - Identify the improvements to state infrastructure that will support districts in implementation of coherent improvement strategies and their evidence-based practices (EBPs)
  - Identify how the state will leverage current initiatives that impact students with disabilities (SWDs)
  - Identify the parties responsible for changing infrastructure, the resources needed to implement the plan, and the timelines for completing improvement efforts
  - Identify how the state will involve other departmental divisions and stakeholders
- Support for district implementation of EBPs
  - Identify how the state will support districts in implementation of EBPs to achieve the SiMR
  - Identify the steps needed to implement the EBPs
  - Identify how the state will support districts in scaling-up and sustaining implementation of the EBPs
- Evaluation
  - Identify how the evaluation is aligned to the theory of action and SSIP components
  - Identify how the evaluation includes stakeholders and will be shared with stakeholders
  - Identify the methods the department will use to evaluate the SSIP
  - Identify how the department will measure the effectiveness of implementation
- Technical assistance and support
  - Identify how the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) and federal technical assistance centers can help with the implementation of the SSIP

*Tennessee's SiMR:  
Increase by three percent  
annually the percent of  
students with an SLD in  
grades 3-8 scoring at or  
above basic on the ELA  
statewide assessment*



## Recap: Phase I

Phase I of the State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) was invaluable for the Tennessee Department of Education to truly begin unpacking the data available on students with disabilities (SWDs) and evaluate how the department could leverage its infrastructure to better support districts as they engage in activities that will lead to the measureable improvement outlined in the State-identified Measureable Result (SiMR) for SWDs. Careful analysis of data relative to SWDs, including the percent of the school day during which SWDs have access to core instruction, graduation rates, and post-school outcomes for SWDs, was conducted by staff within the division of special populations.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the division of special populations examined the department infrastructure currently in place to support the SSIP initiatives. During this infrastructure analysis, interviews were held with state staff from a wide gamut of offices within the department, including: finance, operations, consolidated planning and monitoring, special populations, data and research, and curriculum and instruction.<sup>2</sup> These interviews yielded information about bright spots in the department's infrastructure and areas upon which to improve. Being cognizant of these strengths and challenges in the department's structure was crucial when moving forward to solidify a concrete SiMR.

For the SiMR, the department decided to focus on assessment data aligned with Indicator 3 of the Annual Performance Report (APR). Rather than addressing all assessment results for SWDs as a whole, the focus was placed on English language arts (ELA) assessment data and students with a specific learning disability (SLD). The department and its stakeholders determined the SiMR would be to increase by three percent annually the percentage of students with an SLD scoring at or above basic on the ELA statewide achievement test for grades 3-8. To achieve this SiMR, three coherent improvement strategies were identified. These strategies were purposefully aligned with current initiatives underway in multiple divisions across the department, particularly within the divisions of special populations and curriculum and instruction. The coherent improvement strategies identified were:

1. Increasing access for SWDs to high-quality core instruction
2. Addressing special education as the most intensive intervention in a continuum of service model
3. Addressing students' skill deficits as they relate to academic content standards so they can succeed in the general education setting.

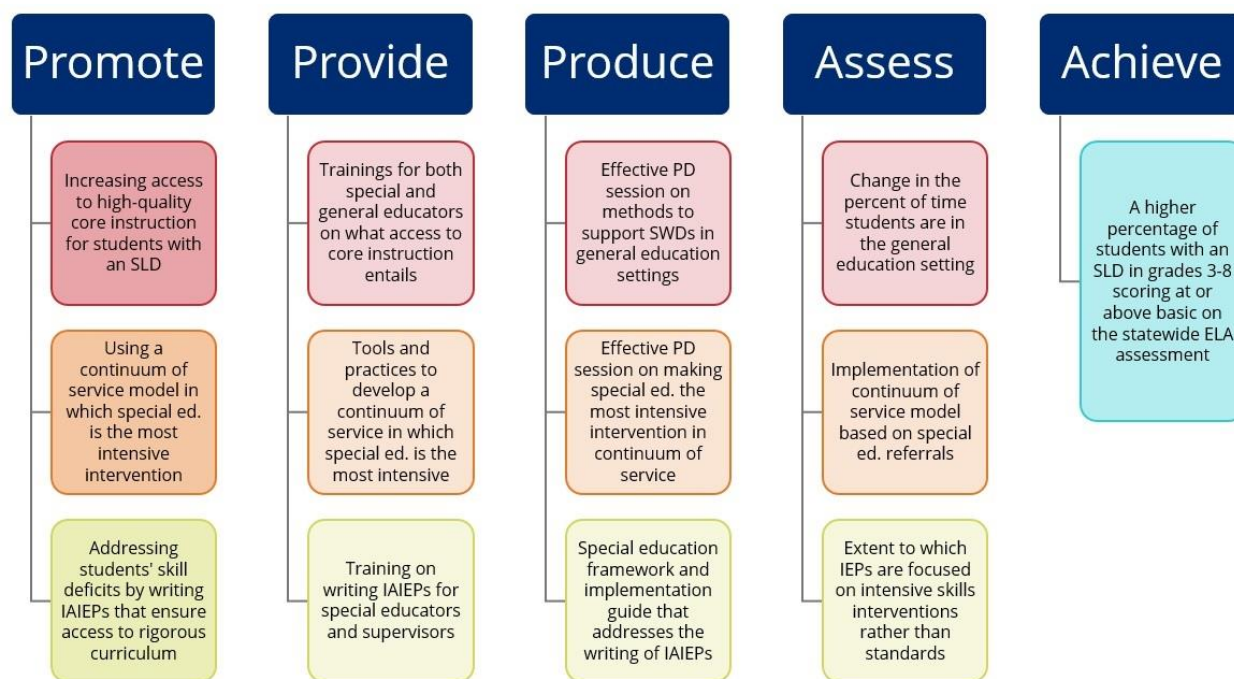
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<sup>1</sup> Former title of the division in place when Phase I was written. This division has now been restructured and titled the division of special populations and student support

<sup>2</sup> Former title of the division in place when Phase I was written. This division has now been restructured into two separate divisions, titled the division of academic strategy and operations and the division of content and assessment design.

All three of these strategies are focused on providing SWDs access to core instruction from content experts while providing differentiated instruction and intensive interventions to meet their area(s) of need. The department remains confident that effective implementation of these three initiatives can help all SWDs succeed and improve on assessments, including those students with an SLD.

The more detailed theory of action below delineates the steps by which the SiMR will be achieved. This theory of action has been slightly modified from the original version included in Phase I. After internal conversations about the coherent improvement strategies and how to effectively provide supports to districts relative to associated evidence-based practices (EBPs), some adjustments were made. Figure 1.1 below disaggregates the inputs, strategies, activities, and short- and long-term outputs for the three coherent improvement strategies, and specifies how they will work in concert to achieve the SiMR.



**Figure 1.1.** The detailed theory of action from Phase I.

While data and infrastructure analysis were the bedrock upon which Phase I of the SSIP was built, stakeholder input was equally integral to each step in the process and was solicited whenever possible. Information relative to data investigations and infrastructure assessments was reviewed by special education supervisors, educators, parent advocacy groups, and the Governor's Advisory Council for the Education of Students with Disabilities. The latter organization represents parents of SWDs, individuals with disabilities, educators, and student and parent advocates. Stakeholders provided feedback and guidance to the division to help identify the SiMR and develop a theory of action. This authentic

stakeholder engagement has carried over into Phase II and continued to provide unique perspectives that have helped the department further refine and shape the SSIP and the work to be done in Phase II.



## Moving Forward: Phase II *Infrastructure Development*

As Phase I of the SSIP wrapped up and work for Phase II got underway, major shifts took place within the department. In January 2015, Kevin Huffman, who served as the Commissioner of Education for approximately four years, resigned, and Candice McQueen was appointed in his place. Under her leadership, the department was restructured over the spring and summer of 2015. This restructure<sup>3</sup> is particularly noteworthy in discussions of infrastructure development in Phase II as the new organizational structure better supports LEAs with implementing and scaling-up EBPs to achieve the SiMR.



### ***Improvements to State Infrastructure***

Under the restructure, the division previously known as special populations became the division of special populations and student support. This restructured division now houses the office of special populations (including students with disabilities), all early childhood programs (including the early intervention systems, Part C and 619), the state special schools, and the office of safe and supportive schools. The wide range of programs within the division and their proximity to and alignment with each another have made for a very collaborative environment. The continuum of services from birth through 21 for all students, particularly SWDs, is crucial to the division and department's new strategic plan. As well, the wrap-around services addressed by the office of safe and supportive schools help the division remain mindful of the supports available to districts and students that go beyond just the classroom to the school and community.

One of the most critical shifts in the restructure was the placement of the division of special populations and student support under the chief academic officer. This aligned the division of special populations and student support with offices previously isolated, including the divisions of: teachers and leaders; content and assessment design (formerly under the now defunct division of curriculum and instruction); academic strategy and operations (formerly under the now defunct division of curriculum and instruction); college, career, and technical education; and the Centers of Regional Excellence (CORE) district support offices.

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<sup>3</sup> A copy of the new department organizational chart, titled "Attachment 1 – Org Chart," has been attached under the "Phase 2 SSIP" tab in GRADS 360. For more information on the structure of the Tennessee Department of Education, please see the department directory at: <https://www.tn.gov/education/topic/directory>.

Such realignment has ensured that the division of special populations and student support has an active voice and role within the academic functions of the department and streamlined the communications with other offices relative to the goals and strategies of the division, including the SSIP. In light of this, delivery of information and support to districts has become more efficient and intentional, with a clear message coming from one large cohesive team rather than smaller, disparate teams. Divisions under the chief academic officer now work in concert with one another to provide support to districts relative to the department's new strategic plan. Thus, the division of special populations and student support can ensure that the SiMR is a focal point of the department as a whole rather than a subsection.

### ***Implementation Team***

The core leadership, namely the Commissioner of Education and her office, led the charge in restructuring the department to address many of the concerns that were noted in Phase I relative to department infrastructure. This leadership team was made aware of the SSIP and SiMR and the consternation around department structure potentially impeding the work to be done. Some additional positions were developed to address staffing shortages and teams were reorganized to better support department staff and the work being done. As aforementioned, this restructuring to better support internal staff and districts took place in early 2015 and the strategic plan (see more below) was released in the fall of 2015.

The anticipated outcome of this department reconfiguration is increased collaboration across divisions in the department with unified, clear communication consistent across the entire department. To assure this consistency, the department released a strategic plan to all districts and stakeholders across the state that affirms the priorities of the department and how they will be attained.

### ***New Strategic Plan***

When discussing improvements to the department's infrastructure, it is important to note that the strategic plan largely shaped the restructuring of the department to ensure alignment between the goals of the plan and the divisions across the department. In late September 2015, the department released this new strategic plan for Tennessee.<sup>4</sup> The strategic plan has three main goals:

- Tennessee will continue rapid improvement and rank in the top half of states on the Nation's Report Card. *Measurement: Tennessee will rank in top half of states on 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) assessments in 2019.*

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<sup>4</sup> A copy of the strategic plan, titled "Attachment 2 – Strategic Plan," has been attached under the "Phase 2 SSIP" tab in GRADS 360.

- The average ACT score in Tennessee will be a 21, allowing more students to earn HOPE scholarships. *Measurement: Tennessee will have an average public ACT composite score of 21 by 2020.*
- The majority of Tennessee high school graduates will earn a certificate, diploma, or degree. *Measurement: The class of 2020 will be on track to achieve 55% postsecondary completion in six years.*

To achieve these goals, the department identified five priorities:

- *Early Foundations and Literacy:* Building skills in early grades to contribute to future success.
- *High School and Bridge to Postsecondary:* Preparing significantly more students for postsecondary completion.
- *All Means All:* Providing individualized support and opportunities for all students with a focus on those who are furthest behind.
- *Educator Support:* Supporting the preparation and development of an exceptional educator workforce.
- *District Empowerment:* Providing districts with the tools and autonomy they need to make the best decisions for students.

The priority most salient to Tennessee's SSIP is the *All Means All* priority. The work done to support this priority will include:

- Enhanced support with sharing best practices for RTI<sup>2</sup> in specific grade levels
- Pilot programs for personalized learning opportunities that support both students who are behind needing remediation and students who are advanced needing acceleration
- Addressing systemic gaps in different student groups' access to highly-effective teachers

The work for the All Means All priority is very closely aligned to initiatives launched over the last two years within the division of special populations and student support, including the three coherent improvement strategies and their EBPs delineated in the SSIP. Having the All Means All priority within the strategic plan for the department as a whole underscores the state's commitment to special populations, highlights the value of the work currently being implemented by the division of special populations and student support, and connects the work to other divisions.

### ***State Personnel Development Grant***

The State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG) was awarded to Tennessee in 2015. This grant offers the opportunity to increase state capacity to better support districts in implementation of the coherent improvement strategies and their EBPs. The SPDG is completely aligned to the SSIP, with both working in tandem to achieve the SiMR. Allocation of resources to a common goal will prove extremely beneficial throughout the coming phases of the SSIP. As well, the SPDG will be a crucial resource to improve and augment human capital within the department. The infrastructure of the division of special populations and student support will be strengthened with the addition of three new full-time



staff members to serve as interventionists in the three grand divisions of Tennessee (east, middle, and west). While the interventionists have not yet been hired, an explicit set of criteria provided in the “Support for District Implementation of EBPs” component will be used to identify quality candidates. The addition of these three staff members will greatly strengthen the work being led by division staff and, in part, address the lingering capacity issues cited in Phase I.

The interventionists will be responsible for providing the training support to district-identified academic coaches in conjunction with other necessary trainings for district administrators and teachers. In addition to providing these supplementary training opportunities, the interventionists will provide continuing support through regional monthly communities of practice. These communities of practice will provide opportunities for professionals to meet regularly to review the strategies learned through trainings, report on successes, and work through problems of practice. Such a forum was found successful in the state’s prior SPDG. Communities of practice will focus on improving participants’ abilities to implement the interventions taught during trainings through the use of aggregated implementation fidelity data and discussions of successes and challenges.

### ***Coherent Improvement Strategies and District Support***

The coherent improvement strategies outlined in Phase I overlap with the work undertaken by many divisions across the department. However, during Phase I, the onus of the coherent improvement strategies and their support fell primarily on the division of special populations and student support. Under the restructure, the division of special populations and student support has forged connections between other divisions to mitigate redundancy of work, foster clearer communication, and develop sustainable supports for districts.

That being said, the division of special populations and student support staff will still be the primary leads on the state implementation team (more information detailed in the “Support for District Implementation of EBPs” component) to provide training on the coherent improvement strategies and their EBPs and support the goals of the SSIP. The division’s instructional programming team, data services team, director of special education eligibility, and assistant commissioner will serve the most pivotal roles in the SSIP implementation process. However, by fostering strong relationships with divisions across the department, staff within the division of special populations and student support can better communicate the goals of the SSIP department-wide to help achieve the SiMR and connect the work being done.

The information demarcated in the sections below was chiefly provided by the instructional programming team, which includes: Tie Hodack, executive director; Alison Gauld, behavior and low

incidence coordinator; Jill Omer, speech, language, and autism coordinator; Blake Shearer, high school intervention and transition coordinator; Ryan Mathis, math intervention specialist;<sup>5</sup> and Joann Lucero, reading intervention specialist.<sup>6</sup>

### *Connections with the Division of College, Career, and Technical Education*

The division of special populations and student support works closely with the division of college, career, and technical education on effectively training and supporting districts with the RTI<sup>2</sup> EBP. The acumen and in-depth knowledge that staff within the college, career, and technical education division offer relative to students in the secondary school grade bands is an excellent supplement when proving training on this EBP. These staff better understand the unique qualities of high school, such as the scheduling structure, graduation requirements, and post-school preparation. Leveraging this knowledge to provide the best support possible to districts has been incredibly valued and well-received by district staff.

Currently, both divisions are working to provide more nuanced training for high schools in particular regarding effective implementation of RTI<sup>2</sup>, and are expanding the RTI<sup>2</sup> Implementation Guide<sup>7</sup> to include information specific to high school. With the division of college, career, and technical education taking the lead on high school, this has allowed the division of special populations and student services to rededicate efforts to supporting RTI<sup>2</sup> implementation in elementary and middle school. By virtue of both the divisions being under the chief academic officer, the collaboration is certainly more sustainable as both are aligned to a common set of goals and expectations. What's more, the division of college, career, and technical education has hired several staff who will be responsible to serve as direct supports to high schools implementing and sustaining RTI<sup>2</sup>. This collaboration is directly connected to the coherent improvement strategies and EBPs that will help the state realize the SiMR.

### *Connections with the Centers of Regional Excellence (CORE)*

As described in Phase I, CORE provides direct support to districts throughout eight regions of Tennessee. These eight agencies are intended to develop regional collaborative relationships with districts and provide technical assistance and professional development opportunities, problem-solving support, and assistance with state-issued requirements or guidance. The proximity to districts

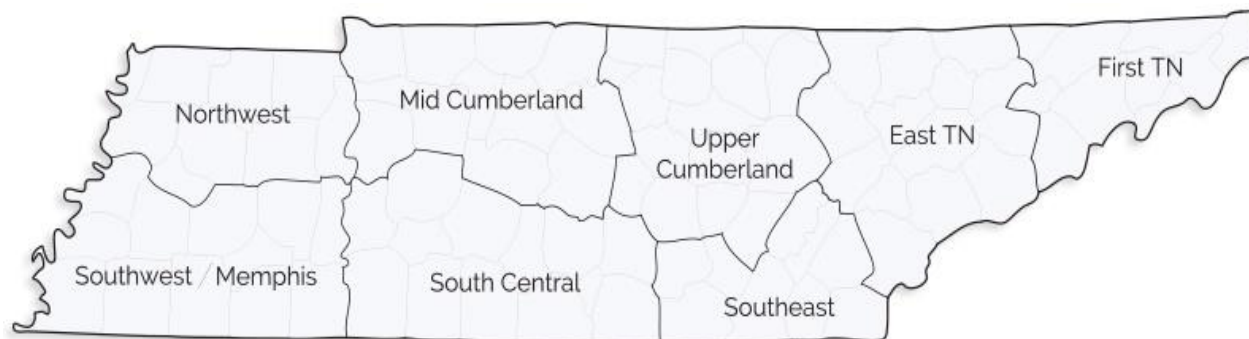
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<sup>5</sup> Ryan Mathis has transitioned to the role of director of outreach, partnerships, and special projects. He will be working to improve communication relative to the SSIP with department staff, districts, and stakeholders. He will continue to support the work of the math interventionist while the department works to fill the vacancy.

<sup>6</sup> Joann Lucero has transitioned to the role of EL instruction and intervention coordinator. She will continue to support the work of the reading interventionist while the department works to fill the vacancy.

<sup>7</sup> A copy of the RTI<sup>2</sup> Implementation Guide, titled "Attachment 3 – RTI<sup>2</sup> Guide," has been attached under the "Phase 2 SSIP" tab in GRADS 360.

and knowledge of their unique needs and challenges imbues CORE with the ability to truly connect with districts and disseminate information efficiently. The CORE staff will play a crucial role in supporting districts with implementing and scaling-up EBPs to achieve the SiMR.



**Figure 1.2.** CORE regions broken out across the state of Tennessee.

Though collaboration with CORE was cited as a concern in the infrastructure analysis done in Phase I, subsequent to the restructure there have been increased opportunities for partnership. Indeed, CORE now falls under the chief academic officer, thus aligning the work of all divisions under this umbrella, including the division of special populations and student support.

While there remain some challenges with the partnership between CORE and the division of special populations and student support, there has certainly been more opportunity for cross-teaming and an increase in uniform communication and support to districts. To further align and strengthen CORE's activities and impact for SWDs, each CORE office has hired an interventionist to provide direct support to districts relative to at-risk populations and special populations, including SWDs. This interventionist is provided the content and training relative to initiatives led by the instructional programming team within the division of special populations and student support. Depending on knowledge, capacity, and needs within each regions, certain topics are redelivered by the interventionist. Trainings that have been provided by interventionists include RTI<sup>2</sup> continuum of service model (addresses data-based decision-making, aligning intervention, and choosing effective interventions), the writing of instructionally appropriate IEPs (IAIEPs), and increasing access for SWDs to core instruction through differentiation and scaffolding.

Over the past several months, members of the instructional programming team have offered training to CORE interventionists to that will enable them to support districts with implementation of the RTI<sup>2</sup> continuum of service model. There are refresher trainings that will continue to be offered regularly to CORE staff. Materials are also provided to CORE interventionists based on the content developed

through the RTI<sup>2</sup> task force. This task force is composed of a wide range of department staff from many divisions, and includes both the assistant commissioner of special populations and student support and the chief academic officer. The group meets regularly to discuss any concerns with the initiative and generate support content for those in the field including CORE staff. Professional learning community (PLC) guides are provided to CORE for redelivery by interventionists to those districts in each region.

In addition, the instructional programming team holds monthly calls and coaching with CORE to address RTI<sup>2</sup> concerns, questions from districts, and any problems of practice to consider. The instructional programming team has worked to ensure that CORE staff are as comfortable as possible with the RTI<sup>2</sup> content to confirm they are providing accurate and quality support to districts by being available for questions and attending training sessions led by CORE staff.

The writing of instructionally appropriate IEPs (IAIEPs) has been an important initiative within the division of special populations and student support over the past two years. Trainings on writing IAIEPs have been provided throughout the state (over 100 of the 146 districts in the state have received training). In addition, the Special Education Framework and Implementation Guide,<sup>8</sup> which provide guidance to districts on developing IAIEPs to ensure students receive high-quality core instruction and intensive intervention specific to their areas of deficit, have been disseminated to districts. In the summer of 2015, the instructional programming team offered a follow-up training to CORE staff in all eight regions on IAIEPs. This session built on previous training offered in 2014. The intent of the training was to help prepare CORE staff to support teachers in the IAIEP writing process and have purposeful conversations around Universal Design for Learning (UDL), least restrictive environments, accommodations and modifications, and addressing the new statewide assessments in the IEP. With the knowledge and guidance from these trainings, CORE interventionists have been able to better assist districts within their region.

The instructional programming team has worked with CORE to promote the coherent improvement strategy of increasing access to core instruction for SWDs. This has been included in the IAIEP trainings provided to CORE staff and in differentiation and scaffolding trainings that address supporting SWDs in the general education setting. These trainings have been provided to districts at regional professional learning communities (PLCs) that CORE staff have hosted, and will continue to be provided over the coming months. The CORE staff also provide guidance and trainings to districts directly as requested.

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<sup>8</sup> A copy of the Special Education Framework, titled "Attachment 4 – Special Ed Framework," and a copy of the Implementation Guide, titled "Attachment 5 – Special Ed Implementation," have been attached under the "Phase 2 SSIP" tab in GRADS 360.

These trainings have reached a wide swath of district level staff, including special and general educators.

### *Connections with the Division of Teachers and Leaders*

Throughout the last year and a half, the instructional programming team within the division of special populations and student support has been working with members of the division of teachers and leaders to establish a way to effectively disseminate information and create buy-in relative to SWDs and the SSIP's three coherent improvement strategies to district staff. The Tennessee Academy of School Leaders (TASL), managed by the division of teachers and leaders, has served as a forum through which to share information with district and site administrators who may not directly educate students. To date, approximately 16 TASL training events have taken place during which information relative to the RTI<sup>2</sup> continuum of service model, IAIEPs, and access to core instruction was provided. One of the intended takeaways from these trainings is the recognition that all students are general education students first, a view that is reinforced in the coherent improvement strategies and their EBPs. By educating leaders in this fashion, the department is ensuring all district staff are receiving the same messages about the strategies and the work being done relative to SWDs. Disseminating the same training and message to all staff mitigates opportunities for leaders to be left unaware of what educators are hearing or what issues they might be facing with implementation of initiatives.

In addition to the TASL trainings, the instructional programming team has provided over 30 administrator trainings to ensure administrators and leaders better understand: their roles in IEP meetings; how to schedule for SWDs and their intervention and make them the most intensive; and how to get SWDs access to core instruction. Not only has training been provided through several rounds regionally, but also individually in districts based upon request. Moreover, presentations have been offered at conferences throughout the state and to special interest groups such as parents and advocates.

### *Connections with Data and Research*

The division of special populations and student support has been connecting with the division of data and research not only to discuss accountability metrics relative to the SSIP, but also to examine research around access for SWDs. In a recent report<sup>9</sup> compiled and disseminated by the research and strategy team, implications of chronic absenteeism were considered. The team found that SWDs were more likely to be chronically absent, with over 12 percent of SWDs found chronically absent relative to

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<sup>9</sup> A copy of the Chronic Absenteeism report, titled "Attachment 6 – Chronic Absenteeism," has been attached under the "Phase 2 SSIP" tab in GRADS 360.

7 percent of non-disabled peers. Because absence thwarts access to core instruction, the division of special populations and student support has recognized that this is an area that requires attention. The work with the division of data and research has lent credence to these concerns with absenteeism and helped formulate some of the work outlined in the RTI<sup>2</sup> Behavior (RTI<sup>2</sup> B) initiative.

### *Connections with the Office of Consolidated Planning and Monitoring (CPM)*

The department has made great strides to develop CPM into a division that can complete widespread monitoring of all federal programs, including IDEA. Due to the complexities of IDEA, training has been provided to CPM staff to ensure they are aware not just of the legislation itself, but also of the work being done in districts relative to SWDs. The instructional programming team has worked with CPM staff throughout the last two years to train on the coherent improvement strategies and their EBPs currently underway. Monitoring consultants within CPM have received training on RTI<sup>2</sup> and how to assess initial SLD eligibilities to determine whether the RTI<sup>2</sup> continuum of service model has been used accurately. The director of special education eligibility for the division of special populations and student support has worked in tandem with monitors reviewing the SLD eligibilities to provide guidance on what they should be looking for in the documents.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, CPM staff have received training from the instructional programming team relative to IAIEPs and access to core instruction (particularly the differentiation and scaffolding training) to complete more thorough monitoring. These trainings have allowed CPM staff to lead work in developing corrective action plans related to IAIEPs and access to core instruction. On the whole, by having CPM staff aware of these EBPs, they can better support districts throughout the planning and monitoring process.

### *Timelines*

With regard to timelines for infrastructure changes, the restructuring and strategic plan led by the Commissioner of Education and her office commenced and concluded in 2015. Throughout this year the division of special populations and student support worked to strengthen connections with divisions across the entire department and increase collaboration. The timelines related to the SSIP activities are contingent on the SPDG. Indeed, these funds will be used to provide the trainings relative to two of the coherent improvement strategies and fund three positions to increase the capacity of the division of special populations and student support. The department is currently waiting on the approval of the SPDG funds by the legislature. Once the funds are approved, the division will immediately begin the hiring process to secure the department interventionists who will support the SSIP.

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<sup>10</sup> Information provided by Theresa Nicholls, director of special education eligibility.



## ***Leveraging Statewide Plans and Initiatives***

Beyond the three coherent improvement strategies and their EBPs highlighted in Phase I, there are many other initiatives taking place throughout the department that have a direct impact on SWDs and could potentially support districts as they implement and scale-up EBPs to achieve the SiMR. Representatives from the division of special populations and student support will play a role in these initiatives, especially if they align the priorities outlined in the new strategic plan.<sup>11</sup>

### ***Early Foundations and Literacy***

Some of the initiatives outlined in the strategic plan include:

- Developing a kindergarten readiness screener by 2017-18 with readiness benchmarks and metrics in literacy, language, and math<sup>12</sup>
- Establishing an Early Literacy Council that defines third-grade reading proficiency and offers best practices
- Holding Regional Educator Summits at CORE offices throughout the state
- Creating an enhanced measurement process to increase pre-K program understanding and accountability for student readiness
- Selecting an optional Tennessee-specific second grade assessment available to districts by 2016-17
- Providing support and training for a statewide literacy coach initiative starting by fall 2017

These initiatives have inherent impacts on and ramifications for SWDs. Thus, it has been crucial for the division of special populations and student support to play an active role in fleshing out this priority. Several staff serve on the Early Foundations task force, which is currently working to establish the screener and the necessary benchmarks that most effectively measure readiness. A pre-K observation tool is also being developed to supplement the screener. Involvement of special populations and student support staff has ensured that SWDs are included in discussions of kindergarten readiness and that metrics do not have bias in assessment of SWDs and other subgroups.

Additionally, a district interventionist sits on the Early Literacy Council to ensure representation of the SWDs subgroup. The council will play a pivotal role in improvements to early literacy in Tennessee. The council's charge is to "specifically draft a report for the commissioner with recommendations related to the definition of third grade reading proficiency, assessment tools for K-2, changes to reading

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<sup>11</sup> This information comes from the strategic plan, a copy of which, titled "Attachment 2 – Strategic Plan," has been attached under the "Phase 2 SSIP" tab in GRADS 360.

<sup>12</sup> Information provided by Tie Hodack, executive director of instructional programming.



standards for teacher preparation, feedback on teacher training and coaching needs, and how to build early literacy foundations into all services that the state provides to children.”<sup>13</sup>

The Regional Educator Summits to be held in summer 2016 will offer teachers professional development opportunities on a wide range of topics. The most salient strand of training for this priority is the evidence-based literacy training focused on grade bands of pre-K to kindergarten, grades 1-2, and grades 3-4. The content of this training is intended to support teachers serving all students, including SWDs. In the early grades, the primary method for engaging students with complex texts is through read alouds. This training will focus on selecting high-quality, appropriately-complex texts for read aloud, how to create read aloud lesson plans that scaffold higher-order questions, how to assemble a unit of read aloud texts that build knowledge and vocabulary, and how to design an aligned culminating task for a unit that includes speaking and writing.<sup>14</sup>

To address the current state of literacy in Tennessee, department developed an internal report, “Setting the Foundation: A Report on Elementary Grades Reading in Tennessee,”<sup>15</sup> in February 2016. It was completed in response to concerns over ELA assessment results and findings that at least half of the students in the state complete third grade without becoming readers. The report honed in on what the assessment results mean, the long-term consequences of students left unprepared with regard to literacy, a dissection of what literacy truly is, and how to go about rectifying the pervasively low literacy results that hinder student outcomes. This is seminal report that aligns well with the literacy component of the SiMR.

The work being done for this priority closely aligns with the SiMR’s focus on improving literacy outcomes. As well, the focus on the foundational grades will help lay a strong base of knowledge for all students, including SWDs, that place them on a positive trajectory for success in later grades. Because the SiMR is focused on outcomes for those in grades 3-8, the department hopes that the favorable effects of the initiatives around early literacy will be manifest in the outcomes on the ELA statewide assessments.

### ***High School and Bridge to Postsecondary***

Some of the initiatives outlined in the strategic plan include:

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<sup>13</sup> For additional information, see <http://tnclassroomchronicles.org/meet-members-early-literacy-council/>.

<sup>14</sup> For additional information, see <http://tn.gov/education/topic/t doe2-training-2016-summer-professional-development>.

<sup>15</sup> A copy of this report, titled “Attachment 7 – Setting the Foundation,” has been attached under the “Phase 2 SSIP” tab in GRADS 360.



- Establishing postsecondary and career planning requirements for middle and high school students
- Assembling a cross-agency task force that will define postsecondary and workforce readiness
- Fostering more academic partnerships between high schools and Tennessee Colleges of Applied Technology (TCATs)
- Developing the CollegeforTN.org portal and support pathway that allows students, parents, and counselors to determine how students are progressing in comparison to key college-readiness benchmarks

While many of the initiatives related to this priority are still in inchoate stages, the division of special populations and student support has been in constant communication with the division of college, career, and technical education to discuss how SWDs fit into the plans. The latter division will be taking the lead on many of these initiatives. Currently, the instructional programming team in the division of special populations and student support has been extremely focused on transition planning for SWDs and is developing a transition framework with input from a transition task force. This work will fold nicely into the new requirements for middle and high school students related to postsecondary and career planning taking place for all students. Additionally, the instructional programming team has established a work-based learning (WBL) leadership council for special education that will provide trainings and support to districts across the state. This council will also meet to discuss the academic standards for the WBL 6107 course code in high school. The information gleaned from this work will be invaluable as the cross-agency task force is assembled to define postsecondary and workforce readiness for all students, including SWDs.

### ***All Means All***

Some of the initiatives outlined in the strategic plan include:

- Training on RTI<sup>2</sup> and RTI<sup>2</sup> Behavior (RTI<sup>2</sup> B) that includes climate, attendance, anti-bullying, and behavioral supports
- Increasing access to core instruction for ELs
- Piloting personalized learning programs to support student remediation and acceleration
- Data sharing and best practice networking aimed at closing districts' teaching equity gaps
- Creating a state-facilitated student advisory group to advise the department on student needs
- Developing educator data dashboards and early warning data systems

Much of the work related to this priority is being led by staff within the division of special populations and student support. While RTI<sup>2</sup> B will be an optional general education initiative, and will address behavior concerns for all students, SWDs will be a major topic of discussion. The instructional programming team will host trainings to discuss the newly released RTI<sup>2</sup> B manual and support districts in their implementation of the behavior component. Addressing behavior in a positive and

consistent manner means students will be able to continue accessing content in their least restrictive environment.

Teacher equity gaps have been an increased focus within the department, and the division of special populations and student support is currently working with the division of teachers and leaders to analyze these persistent equity gaps. The division of teachers and leaders has already conducted a great deal of research on the equity gaps for all students and shared their studies with districts to engage in a dialogue of how to place the districts' most effective teachers to improve outcomes for students. This division is now looking at disaggregating the data gathered in their research to look at the impact on SWDs and how teachers are assigned to the students of greatest need. The information yielded from this research will be used to assist districts in the equitable allocation of their most effective staff.

The increased emphasis on safeguarding that all SWDs have access to core instruction, as evidenced by the behavior initiatives and RTI<sup>2</sup> continuum of service models, aligns this priority nicely with the SSIP's SiMR. Indeed, for students to succeed on statewide assessments, they must have access to the core content measured by these assessments. In addition, by using a multi-tiered system of support like RTI<sup>2</sup> to begin referral procedures for students suspected of an SLD, the amount of students inappropriately identified will be abated, thus allowing more resources to be allocated to those actually requiring special education supports. More intensive intervention can help close skill gaps and improve student outcomes on standards-based assessments.

### ***Educator Support***

Some of the initiatives outlined in the strategic plan include:

- Developing an improved public report card evaluating the performance of educator preparation programs
- Using student surveys as a component of teacher evaluation
- Creating a rubric designed to support districts and schools in evaluating professional learning options
- Additional Teacher Educator Acceleration Model (TEAM) coach support
- Allocating support for differentiated pay plans aligned to instructional priorities
- Developing a Governor's Academy for School Leadership to train aspiring school principals
- Developing a transformational leadership advisory council

The division of special populations and student support has been working in concert with the division of teachers and leaders to assess the current TEAM intervention observation tool. Sometimes it is difficult for district leaders to effectively evaluate special education teachers and provide viable

feedback due to the unique nuances and skills involved in educating SWDs. Further training for these leaders, which have and will continue to be provided at the TASL academies, will allow for increased knowledge in this specific area, but a revamped tool to observe special education teachers will also be critical. Leaders being more cognizant of the role of the special educator will be better equipped to provide feedback and support to these teachers, ultimately leading to improved outcomes for SWDs.

The instructional programming team has secured a Collaboration for Effective Educator Development, Accountability, and Reform (CEEDAR) Center grant to assist three participating universities (University of Memphis – Lambeth, Vanderbilt University, and University of Tennessee) with improving special education teacher preparation programs. Through the grant, the instructional programming team will be able to relay to these participating teacher preparation programs: Tennessee’s educational priorities, the gaps in the knowledge seen with recent graduates from teacher preparation programs across the state, and how such gaps can be ameliorated. The increased collaboration between the department and special education teacher preparation programs will help ensure that special educators are exiting universities with the appropriate skills to support SWDs and department initiatives. To connect this work to the SSIP, the participating universities in this CEEDAR grant will be included on the evaluation team (see “Evaluation” component) to both share with them the three coherent improvement strategies identified by the department and benefit from their acumen.

### ***District Empowerment***

Some of the initiatives outlined in the strategic plan include:

- Developing communication toolkits to assist districts in sharing their own data
- Providing technical assistance on creating comprehensive multi-year plans using the coordinated spending guide
- Developing real-time educator dashboards providing 360-degree views of student data
- Creating single sign-on access and increased automation for state applications and reporting systems
- Establishing a Learning Management Platform to support adaptive instruction pilots

The data team from the division of special populations and student support has been involved in conversations relative to presentation of data to educators, parents, and district leaders to help them more effectively assess student progress and data. The statewide IEP data management system, EasyIEP, which is provided by the department to all public districts, has been redesigned to provide more effective, actionable data to district staff more quickly. The use of widgets displaying student information (disability categories, educational environment placement, and compliance) have made it easier for users to get a pulse on their students or schools. The ease by which this data is provided gives users something concrete and viable to support their work. The data gathered through the

EasyIEP system will be imperative for evaluation, and more information is specified in the “Evaluation” component.

## ***Stakeholder Input***

Throughout Phase I and Phase II, the department has continued to solicit feedback from stakeholders. State infrastructure has been a consistent topic of conversation in these requests for feedback as so much of the success of the SSIP is contingent on effective organization. In the fall of 2015, the director of data services spoke across the state at three separate conferences for special education supervisors about the status of the Phase II and the need to assess infrastructure<sup>16</sup>. These supervisors were encouraged to complete a survey developed by the department to assess stakeholder perceptions of the state infrastructure, how well the coherent improvement strategies and EBPs have been communicated to districts, what the most effective way to evaluate the SSIP might be, and what evaluation questions should be asked.<sup>17</sup>

The survey was also sent to the parent advocacy group STEP (Support and Training for Exceptional Parents) to disseminate to families; the Governor’s Advisory Council for the Education of Students with Disabilities members, which includes individuals with disabilities, parents of students with disabilities, educators, and district staff; and to users of the statewide IEP data management system, EasyIEP, which include teachers, related services providers, psychologists, and other IEP team members who work in the system. The survey was sent to this wide cadre of stakeholders to ensure that the unique perspectives of all were recognized and considered.

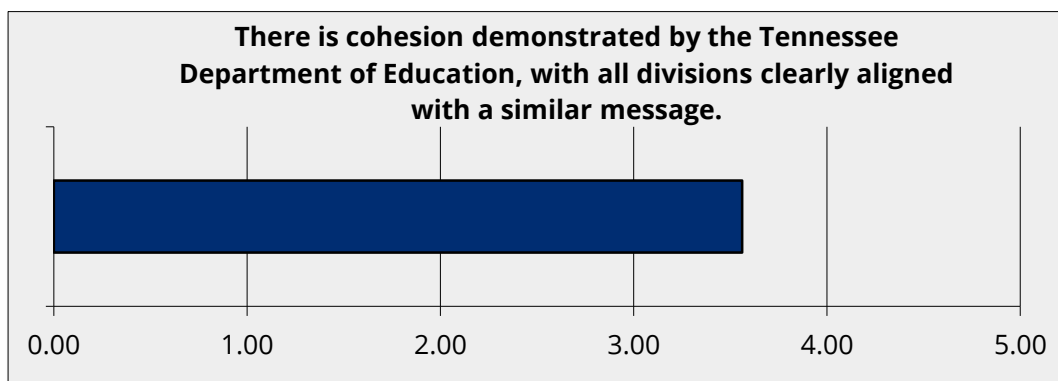
Approximately 78 stakeholders completed the survey. While this certainly wasn’t an extremely large proportion of all those from whom feedback was solicited, the department was pleased to receive quality and thorough responses from a diverse cross-section of stakeholders. The feedback provided excellent information about the perceptions of the department’s infrastructure, problematic areas in the arrangement, and observation of whether or not the current structure will be able to effectively support districts in the coherent improvement strategies and their EBPs. The following data was gathered from the survey relative to infrastructure.<sup>18</sup>

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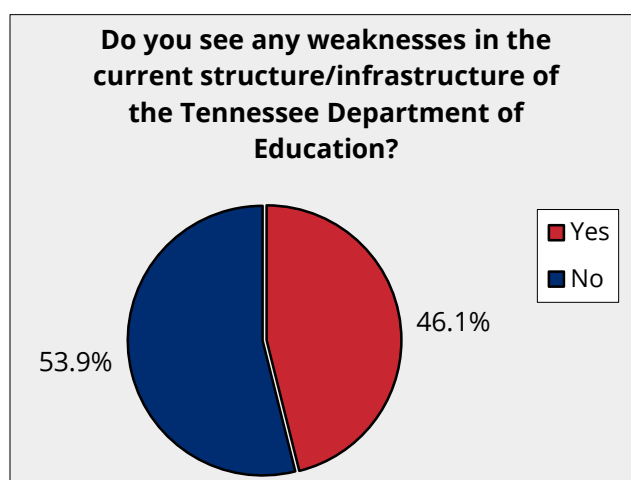
<sup>16</sup> Information provided by Rachel Wilkinson, director of data services.

<sup>17</sup> A copy of the survey, titled “Attachment 8 – Survey,” has been attached under the “Phase 2 SSIP” tab in GRADS 360.

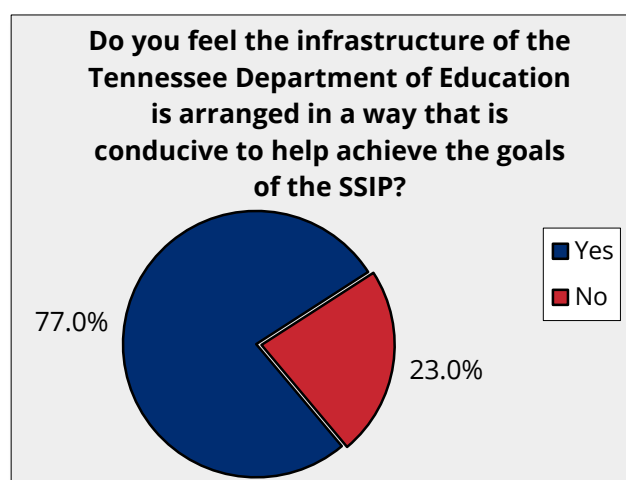
<sup>18</sup> A copy of the survey results, titled “Attachment 9 – Survey Results,” has been attached under the “Phase 2 SSIP” tab in GRADS 360.



**Figure 1.3.** The average rating was 3.56 out of 5.0, with 54.54% of respondents agreeing and 9.1% strongly agreeing.



**Figure 1.4.** There were 35 respondents who answered “yes” to this question. The reasons that were cited for answering “yes” included: disconnection of the department from districts; high turnover among department staff; conflicting communication or inadequate communication disseminated by department; weaknesses in CORE offices; and poor planning.



**Figure 1.5.** There were 57 respondents who answered “yes” to this question.

On the whole, the feedback from stakeholders was positive. While there were areas of concern, the changes in infrastructure that took place over the past year will likely ameliorate many of these concerns as the wrinkles are ironed out across the organization. Currently, there are efforts taking place across the department to address the issues cited in these surveys. Based on concerns from stakeholders regarding issues with inconsistent or inadequate communication, the department is using a communications review team to evaluate all communication to be disseminated to districts and

the public. Thus, should communications not align, this is addressed on the front end prior to public release.

Updates to the CORE offices are being done to mitigate disconnect between the department and districts. The movement of CORE under the chief academic officer and the increased communications between the division of special populations and student support and CORE based on this arrangement will yield positive results with districts. Trainings provided by the instructional programming to CORE staff are instilling in these employees the knowledge of special education content and resources to better support districts at the ground level.

The revised strategic plan released at the end of 2015 will be an excellent blueprint that will help map out initiatives and department led work so that stakeholders don't experience the frustrations cited with regard to poor planning. By having a comprehensive strategic plan that addresses all divisions and groups within the department, the work is intentional and aligned department-wide. This will prevent initiatives being developed and implemented in isolation and while still nebulous.

Widespread change to infrastructure can certainly take time to be fully established but the connections being fostered across divisions within the department will flourish over time, ideally staving off the concerns shared in the survey. Tennessee will survey these same stakeholders in the fall of 2016 with some of the same questions to see if there is any improvement from the baseline survey data from 2015.



## Moving Forward: Phase II

### *Support for District Implementation of EBPs*

In Phase I, the department developed the three coherent improvement strategies that have been at the forefront of much of the work being done across the state over the past several years. As detailed in the “Infrastructure Development” component, the three strategies are: 1) increasing access for SWDs to high quality core instruction; 2) employing a continuum of service model in which special education serves as the most intensive intervention; and 3) writing instructionally appropriate IEPs (IAIEPs) to address students’ skill deficits as they relate to academic content standards so they can succeed in the general education setting.

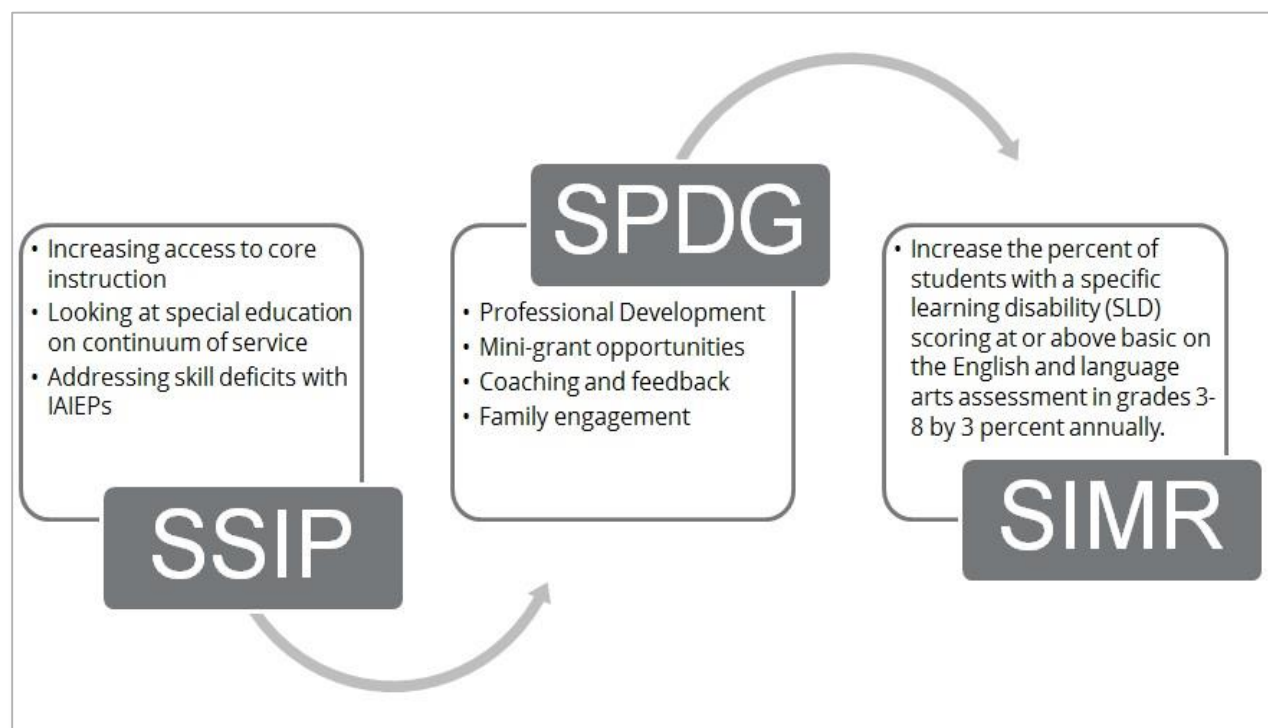
In practice, these three strategies are inextricably intertwined. Indeed, ensuring that SWDs have access to core instruction to the maximum extent possible while still having their needs met in the general education and special education settings encompasses all three strategies. There are numerous evidence-based practices (EBPs) undergirding each of the coherent improvement strategies, and they are entrenched in research and best-practices that have been espoused for decades. Most of these EBPs have already been selected and implemented throughout the state in some capacity. Selection of these EBPs was informed by research and supported by the knowledge and expertise of the members of the department-led task force who each brought their unique perspectives to the table. For the coming school year, further supports for implementation of these EBPs in select districts will continue to be provided to address the goals of the SSIP and achievement of the SiMR.

While the department has implemented the three coherent improvement strategies across the state, continued support for districts as they implement these strategies will be essential to ensure continued student success and sustain EBPs. To provide this support to districts, the state will utilize the State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG) noted in the “Infrastructure Development” component.

When writing the application for the SPDG, much of the scope of work proposed was aligned to the work being done for the SSIP in Phase I. The department made a conscious decision to connect the activities in both programs and to unite resources toward a common goal (the SiMR). To be sure, the department has made great strides to ensure the SSIP does not exist in isolation, and instead that all the work being done, particularly in the division of special populations and student support, is cohesive and uniform.

While the SPDG offers a monetary way in which the department can provide support to districts, this in and of itself does not provide sufficient resources to ensure that districts have the capacity to the

coherent improvement strategies and their EBPs effectively. To identify how to most skillfully provide this support, the department utilized implementation science methodology when writing the application for the SPDG in conjunction with the SSIP. The SPDG is an essential component of the SSIP, and the work done as a result of the SPDG will help achieve the SiMR.



**Figure 2.1.** This graphic underscores the connection Tennessee has made between the SSIP, SPDG, and SiMR. The SSIP is the plan with coherent improvement strategies, the SPDG provides the resources to implement these strategies and their EBPs, and both work in concert to achieve the end goal, which is the SiMR.



## Use of Implementation Science

During identification of the coherent improvement strategies in Phase I, the department employed the major tenets of implementation science to develop a plan for district support.<sup>19</sup> This same process was utilized in the SPDG to ensure alignment with the SSIP. To begin the process of fleshing out the SSIP's scope of work, the department determined the key implementation teams that would be involved with the SSIP, identified usable interventions (the coherent improvement strategies and their EBPs), plotted out the implementation stages of the SSIP, assessed the implementation

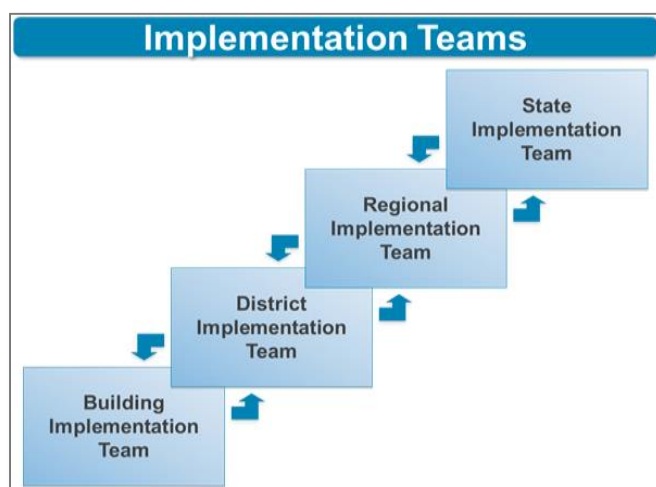
<sup>19</sup> Dean L. Fixen, et al, "Implementation Research: A Synthesis of the Literature," *National Implementation Research Network* (Tampa, FL: University of South Florida, 2005).



drivers needed to successfully support the work of districts, and addressed improvement cycles to best exact the new policies and practices outlined in the SSIP.

### *Implementation Teams*<sup>20</sup>

As the department began to assess its capital and resources during Phase I and Phase II, it became clear that implementation teams would need to be established to certify success of the SPDG and SSIP as well as the application of coherent improvement strategies and their EBPs in districts across the state. Based on research regarding implementation science, the department recognized the need for multiple implementation teams at different levels.



**Figure 2.2.** The interrelation of the four different implementation teams.



#### *State Implementation Team*

The implementation team for the SSIP at the state level is primarily comprised of members of the division of special populations and student support, including the assistant commissioner of special populations and student support (Joey Hassell), the executive director of instructional programming (Tie Hodack), the director of special education eligibility (Theresa Nicholls), the director of data services (Rachel Wilkinson), the high school intervention and transition coordinator (Blake Shearer), the speech, language, and autism coordinator (Jill Omer), the reading intervention specialist (Joann Lucero), the math intervention specialist (Ryan Mathis), and the behavior and low-incidence coordinator (Alison Gauld). Each member of this implementation team has an in-depth knowledge of core competencies related to the SSIP and brings a crucial set of skills and knowledge about special education programs, effective instruction and intervention practices, and experience in making data-based decisions.

In addition, the reading intervention specialist and math intervention specialist on the implementation team have worked with content experts in literacy and math in the former division of curriculum and instruction with developing content and delivering training relative to strategies like access to core

<sup>20</sup> Karen A. Blasé, et al, "Implementation Science – Changing Hearts, Minds, Behavior, and Systems to Improve Educational Outcomes," Paper presented at the Wing Institute's Ninth Annual Summit on Evidence-Based Education, Berkeley, 2015.

instruction and continuum of service models. The collaboration with these staff members on the general education side has helped create a more well-rounded set of resources to support all educators and districts across the state. In light of this partnership, these curriculum and instruction staff in many ways served as members of the implementation team as well. The division of college, career, and technical education have also worked to implement the EBP of RTI<sup>2</sup> in districts across the state to address secondary schools. While these schools are not directly connected with the SiMR, it merits note that this division is integral to supporting districts and redelivering information about this EBP.

Some members of the implementation team, chiefly those from the division of special populations and student support, also played a pivotal role in the development of the SPDG, in addition to various stakeholders from across the state. These stakeholders included: three district partners of various sizes representing districts in east, middle, and west Tennessee (Gibson Special School District, Metro Nashville Public Schools, and White County Schools);<sup>21</sup> project partners from the Center for Literacy, Education, and Employment at the University of Tennessee;<sup>22</sup> program evaluators from the Human Development Institute (HDI) at the University of Kentucky;<sup>23</sup> and the executive director of the parent advocacy group STEP (Support and Training for Exceptional Parents).<sup>24</sup> These stakeholders share much of the same knowledge and understanding of special education and the coherent improvement strategies outlined in the SSIP as the department staff, but they also bring a unique perspective and expertise.

All members of the state implementation team worked in concert to develop a competitive process by which districts would be selected to participate in SSIP work being funded by the SPDG. More information on this selection process will be detailed in subsequent sections.

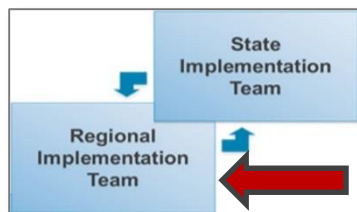
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<sup>21</sup> More information about each district, titled "Attachment 10 – SPDG LEA Partners," has been attached under the "Phase 2 SSIP" tab in GRADS 360.

<sup>22</sup> Includes project co-manager Connie White, project co-manager Donna Parker, and program manager Lisa Crawford. A document with more detailed biographies, titled "Attachment 11 – Biographies," has been attached under the "Phase 2 SSIP" tab in GRADS 360.

<sup>23</sup> Include director of evaluation, Chithra Adams and senior evaluator David McKay. A document with more detailed biographies, titled "Attachment 11 – Biographies," has been attached under the "Phase 2 SSIP" tab in GRADS 360.

<sup>24</sup> Karen Harrison serves as the executive director for STEP. A document with a more detailed biography, titled "Attachment 11 – Biographies," has been attached under the "Phase 2 SSIP" tab in GRADS 360.



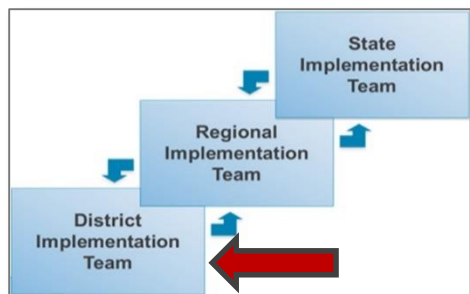
### *Regional Implementation Team*

With financial resources provided through the SPDG, the department will hire three full-time special education interventionists to assist in providing trainings to the approximately 6,000 special education teachers and special education district level personnel across the state.

They will also be supporting general education teachers participating in the strategy of access to instruction. These interventionists will represent the three grand divisions of Tennessee (east, west, and middle Tennessee). They will be the primary members of the regional implementation team and will be responsible for disseminating data down to the districts in each grand division.

The department will recruit and select the interventionists based on their experience providing services and supports to teachers and directly to SWDs. In the selection process, candidates will be rated on their core competencies in the following areas: reading foundations and interventions, accommodation selection and use, behavior assessment and intervention, data usage, and experience providing professional development to teachers and service providers. A minimum of a Master's degree in special education is required. For the first year of the SPDG, the department plans to spend the initial months recruiting and training these interventionists, planning the content for necessary trainings, and developing a communication plan so that expectations for training participants are explicit and clear. The latter part of this first year will focus on recruiting academic coaches to assist with the more widespread trainings. These coaches will be represented on the district implementation team.

In addition to the interventionists who will be supporting districts regionally, the CORE teams will also support districts in their region with the strategies and their EBPs. The CORE staff have received trainings on several of the EBPs to be addressed in the SSIP and have already redelivered some of the information to their districts. They will continue to be a resource to districts participating in the SSIP activities as they work through issues or problems of practice in the work to take place in year one of implementation. Many of the CORE interventionists will be present at the trainings that will be led by the SPDG-funded interventionists to better supplement their knowledge in the specific content areas. With this expanded understanding of the SSIP activities and strategies, these staff will be excellent resources for districts as the work scales-up in the coming years to all districts across the state.



### *District Implementation Team*

The district implementation team will be comprised of the superintendent/director of schools, the supervisor of curriculum and instruction (or similar role), the director of special education, and a district level academic coach to support the work being done in the SSIP activities.

District implementation teams will be developed once districts have been selected to participate in the SSIP activities. A competitive application process for participation open to all public school districts across the state commenced in mid-January and concluded at the end of February.<sup>25</sup> The application was intended to identify those districts with the best infrastructure in place to support the coherent improvement strategies and their EBPs outlined in the SSIP. Initially, the department considered a selection process using accountability metrics and/or APR local determinations and requiring those lowest performing districts to participate. However, it became clear through research on selection processes, implementation science, and site visits to Needs Intervention districts that many of these low performing districts struggled due in large part to weak infrastructure or lack of alignment across all departments in the district. Thus, the SSIP work would not have a chance to succeed, as larger internal issues would likely stymie the initiative.

Communication about the application process was delivered through special education director updates, director updates, and through an information session held at the department's Partners in Education (PIE) conference. Detailed information about the full scope of the SSIP activities and trainings was offered to best inform districts in their decision of whether or not to apply.

All districts were encouraged to carefully respond to the following six evaluation questions:

- How many special education teachers do you have and how many of these teachers have been trained on writing instructionally appropriate IEPs (IAIEPs)? Describe the types of trainings that have been provided and whether there has been follow-up training.
- Describe the types of trainings that have been provided to general education teachers for supporting at-risk students. What, if any, follow-up training has been provided?
- Describe the interventions and resources your district uses to support the most intensive interventions.
- Describe the progress monitoring and data-based decision-making done for SWDs in your district.
- Describe how special education interventions are scheduled in your district.

<sup>25</sup> A copy of this application, titled "Attachment 12 – District SSIP Application," has been attached under the "Phase 2 SSIP" tab in GRADS 360.

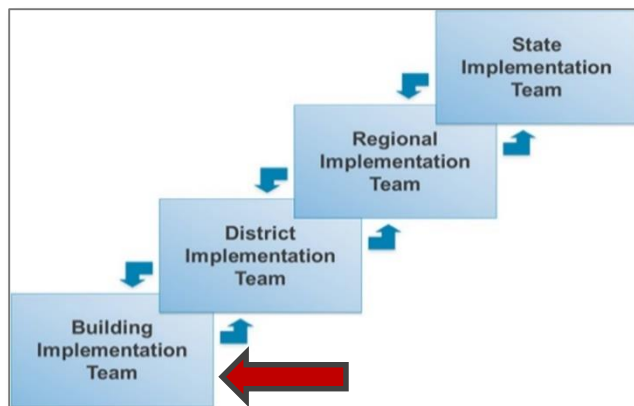
- Describe the opportunities for collaboration within your district between curriculum and instruction staff and special education staff.

Because the department plans to begin implementing EBPs and supports in selected districts as soon as possible, the questions in the application were written to elicit information about the capacity, readiness, and buy-in of districts to begin participating immediately.

As evidenced in the application questions, experience with writing of IAIEPs is a large area of focus within the department. Training on this EBP was conducted across the state for the last several years, and continued training and support will need to be provided to ensure IAIEPs are being written with fidelity. Districts that have already received such training will many ways be ahead of the curve. With this foundation in place, they will be better suited to begin ramping up this work along with other SSIP activities.

To be considered for participation, the superintendent/director of schools, the supervisor of curriculum and instruction (or similar role), and the director of special education must agree to a set of assurances specified in the application and sign the application form indicating their acceptance of these assurances. The assurances include ensuring the attendance of necessary participants at trainings, scheduling professional development days for the trainings, and supporting the training objectives detailed by the department. These three members of the district implementation team are crucial, as their buy-in and support for the work being done is imperative to the success of trainings and supports in the district and implementation at the school level.

The fourth and final member of the district implementation team, the district level coach, will be an educator currently in the district with an additional stipend position to assist with the SSIP activities and trainings in order to more effectively reach teachers and special education personnel at the building level. These coaches will be practicing special education teachers with extensive knowledge and ample experience collaborating with general education teachers and providing intense reading interventions. Because these coaches work within the districts they will be supporting, they have an innate understanding of the opportunities and challenges within the district in conjunction with preexisting relationships with other staff. Coaches are to be nominated by the district and will receive a stipend from the department in recognition of their additional duties. There will also be reimbursement for travel and time spent outside of regular school hours.



### *Building Implementation Team*

The building implementation team will be comprised of the school principal, selected special education teachers, and one general education teacher. These staff members will be selected by district and schools. The schools selected for implementation will be left to the discretion of the district implementation team, who are encouraged to perform a root cause analysis to

assess which schools are best able to take part in the SSIP activities. The state and regional implementation team members will assist districts with the school selection process and provide resources and tools. All members for each building implementation team are required to be present at specified trainings to ensure information about SSIP activities is disseminated accurately and effectively. This is a requirement stipulated in the assurances of the application.

The wide-ranging sizes of districts and the unique structures of each made it very difficult for the department to identify a definitive number of schools and staff to be included in the work at the building level. Indeed, smaller school districts with three schools might have the ability to support the coherent improvement strategies district-wide. However, larger districts with 20 or more schools would likely have to limit the scope of implementation. The department decided to leave the selection process for schools open to districts, while providing valuable tools to help them make these decisions, including a modified version of the department-developed application to participating in SSIP activities.

A minimum of one school and three staff members from the school (principal, special education teacher, and general education teacher) will need to participate in the initial of implementation of the SSIP activities at the school level. At least one of the schools selected must be an elementary or middle school since the 3-8 grade band is the focus of the SiMR. Beyond these minimum requirements, the department cannot make any prescriptive requirements about the exact number of staff from an entire district that need to be included, as the school selection process will be left to the districts' discretion. The department has placed its focus on the quality of the interventions, or depth of the work, not necessarily the amount of participants in the initial phase of implementation. Once districts have effectively implemented strategies and interventions in the school selected for the first year of work, they will be asked to scale-up the strategies in other schools across the district.

## Usable Interventions

Through the work done in Phase I, the three coherent improvement strategies were established. In Figure 2.3, some of the strategies include the EBPs to be used. The department believes that effective implementation of these coherent improvement strategies will yield positive results for all students and achieve the SiMR. Many of these strategies have already

been implemented in the state, however, follow-up supports and assessment of the strategies will be necessary. By providing these supports and follow-up trainings initially to a sample of districts, the department will be able to appropriately gauge the level of supports required by a wide range of districts and evaluate the adequacy of this support in increasing the capacity of districts to implement EBPs. Should supports provided prove effective in this sample, they will be made available to all districts.

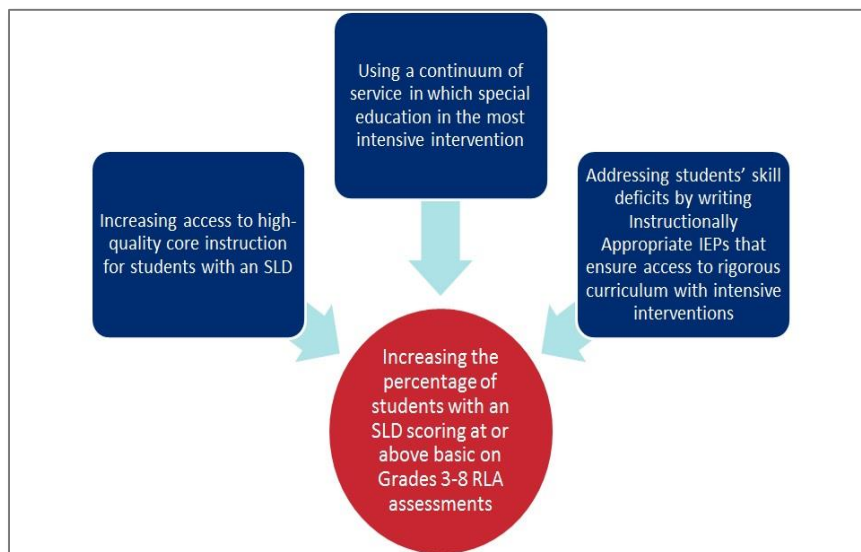


Figure 2.3. The broad theory of action from Tennessee's SSIP, Phase I.

Increasing access to high-quality core instruction for students with an SLD

### Access to Core Instruction

The overarching goal of the work being done to achieve the SiMR is to ensure that students with an SLD have access to core instruction in the general education classroom to the maximum extent possible, as outlined in IDEA legislation. There is a wide body of research that supports the education of SWDs alongside their non-disabled peers. As the department worked through identification of coherent improvement strategies, such research was consulted to bolster development of inclusive practices. To be sure, when SWDs have access to general education classrooms and necessary supports and services to be successful, they have the opportunity to engage in and learn the same instruction their non-disabled peers receive from content experts.

In an age in which assessments drive accountability practices, it seems obvious that providing SWDs access to the actual curriculum that will be assessed on statewide tests will improve outcomes for



SWDs as measured by these tests.<sup>26</sup> Thus, access to core instruction is imperative to achieve the SiMR. In many studies, SWDs educated in the general education setting have shown academic gains, improved performance on standardized tests, and improvement in grades.<sup>27</sup> A great deal of evidence relative to academic results for SWDs “overwhelmingly supports integrated instructional approaches over those that are categorically separated.”<sup>28</sup>

Inclusion of SWDs in the general education setting provides social benefits to both SWDs and their non-disabled peers. Indeed, according to the Salamanca Statement:

Regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective measures of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all; moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system.<sup>29</sup>

Many argue that if education programs are responsible for educating students so that they can realize future success, then inclusion provides the opportunity for children to interact with a wide cadre of individuals.<sup>30</sup> As much as SWDs benefit from access to core instruction and non-disabled peers, so too do non-disabled peers benefit from learning beside SWDs. To that end, non-disabled peers have the ability to learn that all people are unique and that everyone has something special to offer.

For students with an SLD, much research supports educating these students in the general education setting. While not always effective for all students with an SLD, this access is extremely effective for many.<sup>31</sup> Research indicates that inclusion in the general education setting must be made on an individual basis and does not support full inclusion as the placement for all SWDs.<sup>32</sup> It is too myopic and reductive to assume that all students with an SLD can be successful in inclusive classrooms. Thus,

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<sup>26</sup> Jeffery P. Braden, Jennifer L. Schroeder, and Jacquelyn A. Buckley, “Secondary School Reform, Inclusion, and Authentic Assessment” (Madison, WI: Research Institute on Secondary Education Reform, 2000).

<sup>27</sup> Kathleen Whitbread, “What Does the Research Say About Inclusive Education?” <http://www.wrightslaw.com/info/lre/incls.rsrch.whitbread.htm>.

<sup>28</sup> Wayne Sailor and Blair Roger, “Rethinking Inclusion: Schoolwide Applications,” *Phi Delta Kappan* 86, no. 7 (March 2005): 503-509.

<sup>29</sup> United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, “Salamanca Statement,” Paper presented and agreed to in Salamanca, Spain, June 1994.

<sup>30</sup> Dorothea Kerzner Lipsky and Alan Gartner, “Inclusive Education: A Requirement of a Democratic Society,” in *World Yearbook of Education 1999: Inclusive Education*, ed. Harry Daniels and Philip Garner Daniels and P. Garner (London: Taylor & Francis, 2013), 12-23.

<sup>31</sup> Genevieve Manset and Melvyn Semmel, “Are Inclusive Programs for Students with Mild Disabilities Effective? A Comparative Review of Model Programs” *The Journal of Special Education* 31, no. 2 (Summer 1997): 155-180.

<sup>32</sup> Naomi Zigmond, “Where Should Students with Disabilities Receive Special Education Services,” *Journal of Special Education* 37, no. 3 (November 2003): 193-199.



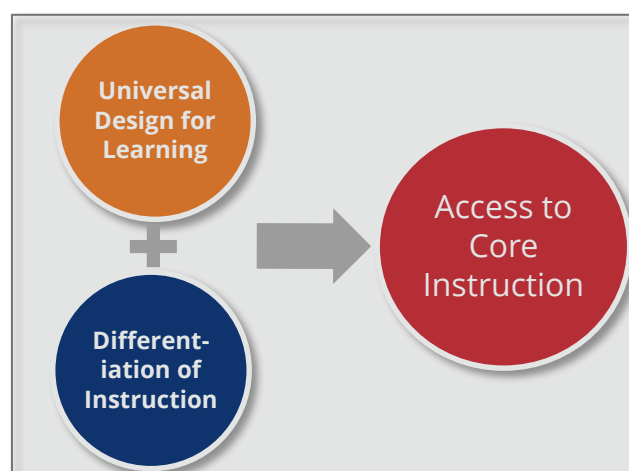
the continuum of service model (see more in subsequent section) is necessary to provide the individualized supports a student may need to be successful in the appropriate setting for him or her.

In Tennessee specifically, the need to increase access to core instruction for SWDs was reinforced by the poor outcomes for SWDs on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) over several years. Tennessee reported one of the lowest participation rates for SWDs on this assessment, and of the SWDs assessed on the NAEP, the majority had an SLD.<sup>33</sup> Those SWDs that did participate struggled greatly, much like their non-disabled peers. However, these SWDs stood at an even greater disadvantage, as they lacked access to the core content upon which they were tested. From 2008-2012 the percentage of SWDs inside the regular classroom 80 percent or more of the day was only around 60 percent.<sup>34</sup>

### Evidence-Based Practices

The department will use two EBPs to address this coherent improvement strategy. These EBPs will be provided through the SSIP activities conducted by the three SPDG-funded interventionists, while others will be provided by the instructional programming team in the division of special populations and student support.

Trainings on universal design for learning (UDL) strategies will be a focus of workshop-based sessions to be offered to those districts selected for participation in this work (detailed in “District Implementation Team” section). A wide range of research about UDL principles and guidelines was consulted when identifying the content of training.<sup>35</sup> First mentioned in the 2004 reauthorization of IDEA, UDL was regarded as a method to support more inclusive practices and presented a set of



**Figure 2.4.** The two EBPs that address the coherent improvement strategy of access to core instruction.

<sup>33</sup> Information gathered from participation data for the 2013 NAEP.

<sup>34</sup> Information provided by the director of data services, Rachel Wilkinson.

<sup>35</sup> Gabrielle Rappolt-Schlichtmann, Samantha G. Daley, and L. Todd Rose, ed. *A Research Reader in Universal Design for Learning* (Boston, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2012).

strategies and principles that would provide opportunities for all students to learn.<sup>36</sup> There were three primary UDL principles<sup>37</sup> developed:

- Principle I – Provide multiple means of representation
- Principle II – Provide multiple means of action and expression
- Principle III – Provide multiple means of engagement

The UDL strategies move away from the one-size-fits-all model in education and encourage diversification of education to meet the needs of all students, including SWDs.<sup>38</sup> Some UDL strategies, including assistive technology and classroom accommodations, have proved extremely effective in supporting SWDs.<sup>39</sup>

The workshop-based trainings that will be conducted by district level academic coaches will focus on the use of UDL strategies to increase access to the general education curriculum for SWDs. These trainings will be offered to both general and special education teachers together. The training facilitators will use research-based adult learning strategies,<sup>40</sup> such as participatory adult learning strategy and guided design to engage the participants.<sup>41</sup> After facilitators provide instruction related to the content, participants will work in groups to apply the information in a case study activity. Participants will dissect a sample lesson plan and apply the strategies they have learned to meet the needs of a fictitious student.

As a bridge to practice, participants will implement the strategies learned within their own classrooms and will be supported through follow-up activities.<sup>42</sup> The follow-up activities will occur through coaching opportunities to assess fidelity of implementation as well as communities of practice<sup>43</sup> in

<sup>36</sup> Dave L. Edyburn, "Would You Recognize Universal Design for Learning if You Saw It? Ten Propositions for New Directions for the Second Decade of UDL," *Learning Disability Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (Winter 2010): 33-41.

<sup>37</sup> David H. Rose and Jenna W. Gravel, "Universal Design for Learning," ed. P. Peterson, E. Baker, and B. McGraw (*International Encyclopedia of Education*, vol. 3 (Oxford: Elsevier, 2010), 119-124.

<sup>38</sup> Grace Meo, "Curriculum Planning for All Learners: Applying Universal Design for Learning (UDL) to a High School Reading Comprehension Program," *Preventing School Failure* 52, no. 2 (Winter 2008): 21-30.

<sup>39</sup> Dave L. Edyburn, "Universal Design for Learning," *Special Education Technology Practice* 7, no. 5 (November/December 2005): 16-22.

<sup>40</sup> Beatrice F. Birman, et al, "Designing Professional Development That Works," *Educational Leadership* 57, no. 8 (May 2000): 28-33.

<sup>41</sup> Karen Jarrett Thoms, "They're Not Just Big Kids: Motivating Adult Learners," Paper presented at The Annual Mid-South Instructional Technology Conference in Murfreesboro, TN, April 2001.


<sup>42</sup> Virginia Buysse, Karen L. Sparkman, and Patricia W. Wesley, "Communities of Practice: Connecting What We Know with What We Do," *Exceptional Children* 69, no. 3 (Spring 2003): 263-277.

<sup>43</sup> Louise Stoll, et al, "Professional Learning Communities: A Review of the Literature," *Journal of Educational Change* 7, no. 4 (December 2006): 221-258.

which participants will share their successes and work through problems of practice. These one day trainings will also be made available as a module on the SPDG website<sup>44</sup> so all teachers will have access to the materials. In order to engage families, the training content will also be modified for a parent-specific audience. The three SPDG-funded interventionists will deliver trainings similar to the aforementioned in collaboration with the department's parent and advocacy partner for this work, STEP. The focus of these trainings will be on increasing knowledge of EBPs in order for families to be active participants in IEP meetings.

In many ways, differentiation and scaffolding of instruction for students is part of the UDL methodology. It encourages educators to respond to variance in students and their learning styles within the classroom to help them succeed.<sup>45</sup> As SWDs and other at-risk populations participate in the general education setting, it is imperative to ensure they have the proper supports in place to be poised for success. To support the strategy of increasing access to core instruction, the instructional programming team has provided widespread trainings on differentiation of instruction over the last year. These staff also trained CORE interventionists so they would be better equipped to assist districts. In the coming months the instructional programming team will also be developing training modules addressing differentiation of instruction to be available to all educators across the state.

Additional trainings in this strategy will be provided onsite for those districts selected to participate in the SSIP activities. These trainings will complement the aforementioned UDL-centric SPDG-funded trainings so that districts will have a well-rounded scope of knowledge when including SWDs in the general education environment.



Using a continuum of service in which special education in the most intensive intervention

### *Special Education in a Continuum of Service*

While it is imperative that SWDs have access to the general education setting to the maximum extent possible, educators and districts must also be cognizant of the individual needs of students and how they are getting the necessary supports to succeed academically. A continuum of service model ensures that the unique needs of all students are met at varying levels. On point, placement full-time in a

<sup>44</sup> The Tennessee SPDG website can be found at: <http://www.tnspdg.com/>.

<sup>45</sup> Paul S. George, "A Rationale for Differentiating Instruction in the Regular Classroom," *Theory Into Practice* 44, no. 3 (Summer 2005): 185-193.

general education setting may not be appropriate for some students,<sup>46</sup> as was noted in the “Access to Core Instruction” section.

Much like inclusion, the research on serving SWDs on a continuum of service can often be mixed, given that the exact definition of a continuum of service can widely vary. Opponents of the continuum model argue that SWDs should not be removed from the general education setting, and cite numerous studies to support this claim.<sup>47</sup> Conversely, proponents of the model contend that while some students can succeed in the general education setting, others benefit from additional services or supports in diverse settings.<sup>48</sup> Indubitably, the efficacy of one model over the other is contingent on many factors, including the district, the implementation of the model, and the student themselves.

When considering students with an SLD, some researched advocate for a for a continuum of service model in which students receive separate supports outside of the general education setting.<sup>49</sup> Students with an SLD have a wide gamut of needs, some of which can be met in the general education setting full-time while others may need to be addressed through additional supports and resources provided outside of this setting. Thus, there remains a need for a continuum of service that can provide interventions to students with an SLD and SWDs as a whole in a manner appropriate for them. The RTI<sup>2</sup> initiative within the state is serving as the continuum of service model and has implications for those students with and without disabilities. This is the primary EBP being used to address this coherent improvement strategy.

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<sup>46</sup> Anne M. Hocutt, “Effectiveness of Special Education: Is Placement the Critical Factor?,” *Special Education for Students with Disabilities* 6, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 77-102.

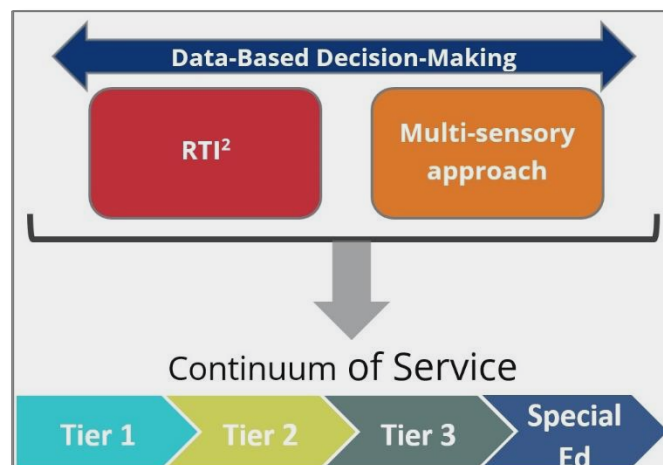
<sup>47</sup> Stuart A. Harrington, “Full Inclusion for Students with Learning Disabilities: A Review of Evidence,” *The School Community Journal* 7, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 1997): 63-71.

<sup>48</sup> Douglas Fuchs, Lynn S. Fuchs, and Pamela M. Stecker, “The “Blurring” of Special Education in a New Continuum of General Education Placements and Services,” *Exceptional Children* 76, no.3 (Spring 2010): 301-323.

<sup>49</sup> National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, “A Reaction to Full Inclusion: A Reaffirmation of the Right of Students with Learning Disabilities to a Continuum of Services” (Washington, DC: NJCLD, 1993).

## Evidence-Based Practices

In Tennessee, a continuum of service model is employed in general education through RTI<sup>2</sup>. In this model, there are three tiers of support that incorporate increasing intensities of instruction by offering specific, research-based interventions to match student needs. Tier I serves as the core instruction and Tier III serves as the most intensive intervention provided through general education. To identify a student with an SLD, this RTI model is used in lieu of the discrepancy model, with the former being a process to determine whether a student responds to research-based intervention as part of the evaluation procedures.<sup>50</sup> The RTI<sup>2</sup> model specific to Tennessee seeks to assess whether a student at risk for an SLD in fact responds to intervention *and* instruction.



**Figure 2.5.** The three EBPs that address the coherent improvement strategy of providing special education in a continuum of service.

The department arrived at the decision to implement the RTI<sup>2</sup> initiative in July of 2014<sup>51</sup> for several reasons, but most notably because the previous methods for supporting and identifying students were simply not working. Indeed, there were issues in the instruction provided to all students across the state, as evidenced by the results of students on statewide assessments and the NAEP. For several cycles of the NAEP, Tennessee ranked in the bottom five states across the nation.

In addition, under the discrepancy model, students were sometimes being identified with an SLD before appropriate measures were taken to provide further intervention in general education settings. Thus, the RTI<sup>2</sup> model has helped to ensure that those students suspected of an SLD are given ample opportunity to respond to additional supports and remediation until it is determined that in fact they require the most intensive intervention. Since the implementation of RTI<sup>2</sup> in July of 2014, there has been an overall decrease in the number of students referred for evaluation with the suspected

<sup>50</sup> John J. Hoover, et al, "National Implementation of Response to Intervention (RTI): Research Summary," <https://www.nasdse.org/Portals/0/NationalImplementationofRTI-ResearchSummary.pdf>, (August 2008).

<sup>51</sup> This was done through a phase-in process. RTI<sup>2</sup> was required to be implemented in elementary schools in the 2014-15 school year. However, if districts applied for a waiver, they would not have to implement RTI<sup>2</sup> in middle schools until the 2015-16 school year, and would not have to implement RTI<sup>2</sup> in high schools until the 2016-17 school year.

disability of an SLD,<sup>52</sup> which demonstrates the success of RTI<sup>2</sup> in curtailing potential over-identification of students with an SLD.

With the implementation of RTI<sup>2</sup>, a clear need arose to define special education as the most intensive along the continuum. To be sure, a student who fails to respond to intervention at Tier III and is therefore identified as a student with an SLD must receive an intervention more intense than what was previously provided through the RTI tiers. To support this need, training relative to educating students on a continuum of service, in which special education is the most intensive intervention, will be provided through the SSIP activities funded by the SPDG.

This strand of training will include content related to providing intense intervention to SWDs by accurately identifying student needs through the use of assessments and progress monitoring data, making data-based decisions regarding those assessments, and aligning student needs with appropriate interventions. In addition, content will focus on the characteristics of appropriate interventions for identified areas of deficit.

The use of a multi-sensory approach based on the research findings of Orton-Gillingham and Lindamood-Bell will also be embedded within the trainings. These trainings will be geared towards special education teachers as a three part mini-workshop series offered throughout the school year with embedded bridges to practice. Each session will focus on specified objectives. Within each session, participants will work together in small groups to practice the skills taught. Participants will complete bridge to practice activities to implement the skills they have learned at trainings within their own classrooms and provide feedback through follow-up activities. These activities will include coaching opportunities to assess the fidelity of implementation as well as communities of practice. The subsequent workshop sessions will build upon the skills learned in the previous session. Each session will also be made available as a module on Tennessee's SPDG website in order to provide access to those teachers unable to attend the face-to-face sessions. In order to engage families, the training content will also be modified for a parent audience and be delivered through the SPDG-funded interventionists in collaboration with STEP.

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<sup>52</sup> Information came from End of Year Referral report data gathered by data services team.

Addressing students' skill deficits by writing Instructionally Appropriate IEPs that ensure access to rigorous curriculum with intensive interventions

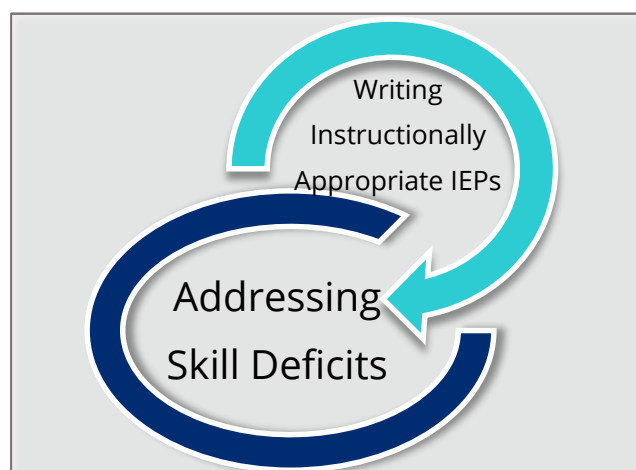
### *Addressing Skill Deficits*

Prior to the 2013-14 school year, the writing of standards-based IEPs was common practice in Tennessee. Districts were encouraged to link student goals to specific state educational standards in a subject area. In theory, this connected the goals of all students to the goals for SWDs, thus maintaining the same high expectations for all students, regardless of disability. But in practice some IEPs across the state became cookie-cutter in nature, with the same goals being used for a wide swath of students. Standards-based goals were reinforced by the statewide IEP data management system, EasyIEP, which provided dropdown menus listing the state academic standards in the IEP goals section of the program. Under this practice, some of the IEPs being developed were truly not in fact individualized.

### **Evidence-Based Practices**

The department convened a task force to discuss the methodology by which IEPs were currently being developed across the state. The 47 task force members included district and school administrators, special education directors, teachers, related services providers, and advocates. Common practices, such as placing students in a special education classroom to be taught state educational standards, were evaluated. There was widespread concern that students were being removed from the core instruction provided by a content expert and not having their skill deficits addressed. On point, having special education teachers replace core instruction rather than intervene on skills-based deficits seemed counterintuitive. As a group, this task force arrived at the conclusion that the standards-based IEPs were in fact not addressing the particular needs of students, and the poor achievement for SWDs buoyed this contention.

The task force developed a special education framework focused on development of instructionally appropriate IEPs (IAIEPs). The framework promotes inclusion for SWDs in the core instruction to the maximum extent possible. Access to core instruction has been a crucial tenet of the IDEA legislation for years and has a wide array of proponents. Research (as detailed in the "Access to Core Instruction" section) suggests that students benefit academically and socially from access to this instruction and non-disabled peers.



**Figure 2.6.** The EBP that addresses the coherent improvement strategy of addressing students' skill deficits.



As detailed in the RTI<sup>2</sup> manual, which was developed in tandem with the special education framework, core instruction is where the educational standards should be taught by the content experts. All students should have the ability to access this information. For those students who require additional support with accessing the content standards, the tiers of increasing intensity of support are necessary. Special education is the most intensive intervention in this continuum of service model, in which interventionists intervene on the skill deficits. This is in stark contrast to the standards focus of the past.

This is not to imply that skills are the sole focus of special education, but instead the skills-based interventions make the standards more accessible to SWDs. The expectation is for all students, including SWDs, to achieve grade-level standards, which obviates the need to list grade-level standards as goals on SWD's IEPs. The writing of IAIEPs ensures that students have access to the grade-level standards while receiving the intervention needed in order to access those standards.

To help educators effectively develop IAIEPs, the department created an implementation guide to supplement the special education framework.<sup>53</sup> This guide breaks out the areas that need to be addressed when writing IAIEPs and provides detailed samples, examples, and documentation forms. The department also provided wide-scale trainings on IAIEPs across Tennessee in the summer of 2014 and individualized trainings to over 100 of the 146 districts from 2014-2015. To date, the department has continued providing trainings as requested and has trained CORE interventionists on writing IAIEPs so they can better assist districts.

In conjunction with the new manual and the trainings being provided statewide, the department also modified the EasyIEP system to remove the dropdown menus that had become a crutch for so many. The dropdown menus were replaced with text boxes in each of the focus areas delineated to effectively write IAIEPs. These areas include:

- Narratives
  - Should note the academic strengths and weaknesses of a student
  - Should note any behavior concerns or medical concerns
- Present levels of performance
  - Should describe the needs of the student that will be addressed by the IEP
  - Should describe the current academic and functional performance of a student
  - Should state what the student can and cannot do in positive terms

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<sup>53</sup> A copy of the Implementation Guide, titled "Attachment 5 – Special Ed Implementation," have been attached under the "Phase 2 SSIP" tab in GRADS 360.



- Should have current test scores, progress monitoring data, and evaluation results when writing the IEP
- Should be specific and tailored to the student
- Should describe the impact of the disability on the student's ability to progress and be involved in the general education curriculum
- Should reference a curriculum standard
- Measurable annual goals
  - Should not reference a curriculum standard, as a standard is not a measurable annual goal
  - Should address what skills the student needs to master the content of the curriculum and close the gap identified in the area of deficit
  - Should be linked to present levels of performance deemed exceptional
  - Should be measurable and specific
- Accommodations
  - Should change how the student is taught or expected to learn
  - Should provide equitable access during instruction or assessments and neither change the construct being assessed nor compromise the integrity or validity of the assessment or content
  - Should reduce or eliminate the effects of a student's disability
  - Should not reduce learning expectations
  - Should be based on a documented need
- Modifications
  - Should change what the student is taught or expected to learn
  - Should only be employed when student performance indicates core curriculum is not sufficient

As an additional resource to evaluate improvement and academic success of SWDs, Tennessee is reimbursing districts for the purchase of a curriculum-based measure to monitor the progress of special education eligible students through the state's IDEA discretionary funding. Districts are allowed to choose between three products: AimsWeb, DIBELS, or EasyCBM. These products were selected through a rigorous request for proposal (RFP) process. The goal of providing this resource is to supply districts with data to assist students in their areas of need, incorporate interventions in the IEP to address these areas, and increase the academic performance of SWDs overall. Moreover, teachers are able to use these assessments to measure the effectiveness of special education interventions and make instructional modifications accordingly. The data collected through these progress monitoring tools will be invaluable for teachers to use when implementing new strategies and making data-based decisions.

Because SLDs are tied to an area of deficit, this disability category lends itself perfectly to the IAIEP writing process. The area of deficit that is noted in the eligibility for a student with an SLD should be manifest in the present levels in the IEP, which would then require a specific goal to be met through

interventions, accommodations, and modifications. Ensuring that those with an SLD are having their area of deficit addressed will attenuate their skill deficits and allow them to better access core instruction and succeed academically. Thus, this EBP aligns perfectly with Tennessee's work toward the SiMR.

### *Implementation Stages*<sup>54</sup>

The solidification of the implementation teams and identification of usable interventions and EBPs has been crucial to fully begin realizing the scope of work to be undertaken in the SSIP over the next several years. To best prepare for the work ahead, the department has assessed the implementation stages that must be traversed to successfully effect change and achieve the SiMR.

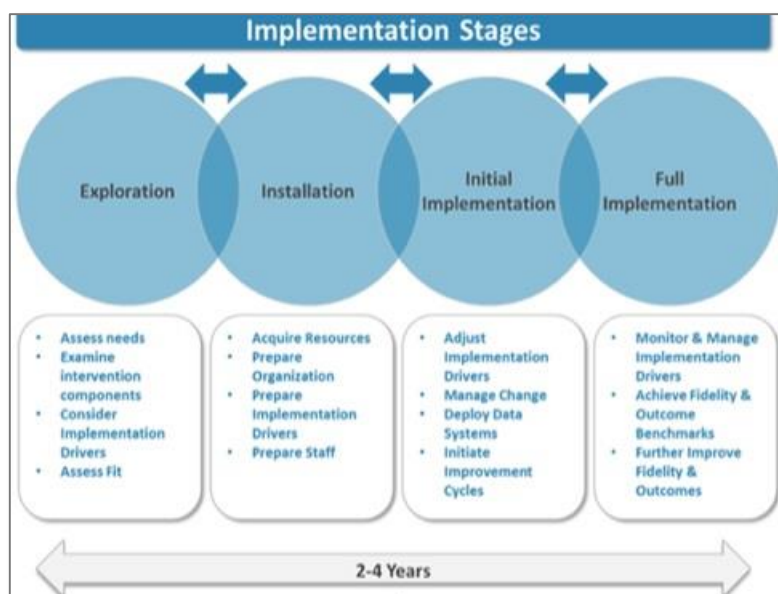


Figure 2.7. The four implementation stages.



#### *Exploration*

The department began the exploration stage prior to and during Phase I of the SSIP. During this stage, staff began assessing the data on SWDs gathered from both the NAEP and the statewide achievement tests as well as data available in the EasyIEP system from the 2013-14 school year. This evaluation coalesced nicely with the data analyses completed in Phase I, as staff on the state implementation team began poring through the myriad information available. This data analysis was a wonderful way for department staff to begin richer conversations about problem areas and potential solutions.

One of the most consistent concerns that arose throughout this exploration stage was student access to core instruction. In the IEPs sampled through EasyIEP, a large proportion of the SWDs population were spending a significant portion of their day outside of core instruction. At the time, approximately

<sup>54</sup> Dean L. Fixsen, et al, "Implementation Research: A Synthesis of the Literature" (see footnote 1).

34 percent of all SWDs were not in the general education setting 80 percent or more the day.

Accordingly, these students were receiving instruction in another location, and the results were:

- Approximately 30 percent of SWDs scoring proficient/advanced on Tennessee's RLA 3-8 assessment
- Approximately 29 percent of SWDs scoring proficient/advanced on Tennessee's Math 3-8 assessment
- Approximately 27 percent of SWDs scoring proficient/advanced on Tennessee's Algebra I End of Course (EOC) assessment
- Approximately 14 percent of SWDs scoring proficient/advanced on Tennessee's Algebra II EOC assessment
- Approximately 23 percent of SWDs scoring proficient/advanced on Tennessee's English II EOC assessment
- Approximately 7 percent of SWDs scoring proficient/advanced on Tennessee's English III EOC assessment

As was detailed in the "Addressing Skill Deficits" section, making interventionists responsible for teaching core instruction was clearly not having a positive effect on the assessment results of SWDs.

Of particular concern was poor performance and restrictive placements for students with an SLD. As students with specific areas of deficit and non-cognitive impairments, it would seem intuitive that they would only be receiving intervention for their actual areas of deficit. However, 29 percent of students with an SLD were not in the general education setting 80 percent or more the day and these students only comprised 45 percent of the total SWDs in the general education setting 80 percent or more of the day. The performance of students with an SLD certainly did not support these more restrictive placements. Indeed, the results were:

- Approximately 20 percent of students with SLD scoring proficient/advanced on Tennessee's RLA 3-8 assessment (with the modified assessment and alternate assessments excluded, the percentage dropped to 12 percent)
- Approximately 21 percent of students with an SLD scoring proficient/advanced on Tennessee's Math 3-8 assessment (with the modified assessment and alternate assessments excluded, the percentage dropped to 15 percent)
- Approximately 24 percent of students with an SLD scoring proficient/advanced on Tennessee's Algebra I EOC assessment
- Approximately 11 percent of students with an SLD scoring proficient/advanced on Tennessee's Algebra II EOC assessment
- Approximately 15 percent of SWDs scoring proficient/advanced on Tennessee's English II EOC assessment
- Approximately 4 percent of SWDs scoring proficient/advanced on Tennessee's English III EOC assessment

This data analysis clearly demonstrated actions needed to be taken to improve outcomes for SWDs, particularly those with an SLD. Initial conversations about access to core instruction, special education in a continuum of service, and addressing skill deficits began taking shape in the 2013-14 school year. Research supported EBPs like UDL as an inclusionary practice and the RTI model in which special education was the most intensive part of the continuum of service model. This same research also cautioned that simply placing SWDs in the general education setting or addressing their needs on a multi-tiered continuum of service did not assure success. Indeed, SWDs would require the necessary supports in their skill deficit areas to better access core instruction and the standards. Thus, this necessitated an EBP of writing IEPs tailored to the specific needs of students.

In addition, changes and reforms around state academic standards were already taking place in the department during this timeframe, which created a policy window in which these EBPs relative to special education could be considered. The department leadership had also increased its focus on closing subgroup gaps, particularly between SWDs and their non-disabled peers. As districts were preparing for changes relative to academic standards and were encouraged to focus on improving subgroup academic outcomes, it seemed a natural progression that guidance be put into effect to help districts support SWDs.

For the sake of the SSIP and identification of a SiMR, the department decided to focus primarily on literacy results based on stakeholder feedback and data analysis. Literacy serves as the bedrock for success in all areas; indeed, if a student cannot read, this will impede success in all other core subjects. As well, because the early grades lay such a crucial foundation for future educational success, the grade band of 3-8 was identified for the SiMR. Finally, because students with an SLD comprise nearly half of all SWDs in Tennessee and yet they have subpar performance on assessments, even compared to some other disability categories, the department identified this disability category to be an important focal area. While the state-identified coherent improvement strategies are intended to help all SWDs succeed, based on the exploration phase the explicit group of students identified for the SSIP were those with an SLD in grades 3-8 participating in the statewide ELA assessment.

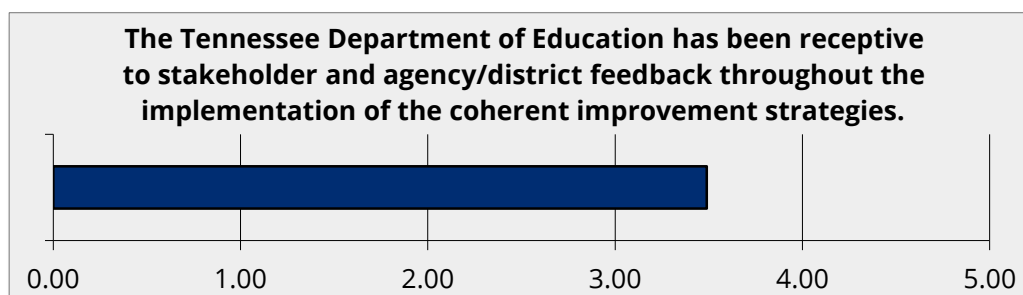


### Installation

#### *Installation*

In the installation phase, stakeholder feedback was imperative to ensure that the strategies and their EBPs would be a fit for the state. Task forces were convened to discuss these strategies and included a diverse group of educators, administrators, advocates, and department staff that could each provide unique insight from disparate perspectives. Conclusions from these task force meetings were that the EBPs were sound and could effectively support and improve the

outcomes of SWDs. However, consideration of implementation drivers was also crucial to assess capacity for this work and the changes to be made (see more in “Implementation Drivers” section). On the whole, based on SSIP survey sent out to stakeholders in the fall of 2015, respondents found the department to be particularly receptive to the feedback provided while developing the coherent improvement strategies.



**Figure 2.8.** The average rating was 3.49 out of 5.0, with 39.13% of respondents agreeing and 14.49% strongly agreeing

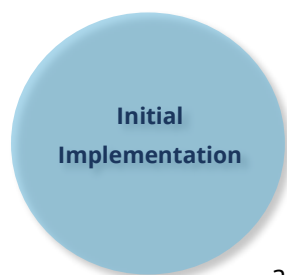
After the strategies and EBPs were identified, the process of developing both a special education framework and RTI<sup>2</sup> manual with the input of task forces and the public began. As well, staff from the division of special populations and student support began providing widespread presentations on the prospective changes, soliciting feedback from a wide range of groups including parents, advocates, teachers, related services providers, psychologists, and district and school administrators. During the 2013-14 school year, a large portion of the state’s Partners in Education (PIE) conference was dedicated to educating the state about these EBPs, particularly RTI<sup>2</sup>.

It was also during this timeframe that the department increased its capacity within the division of special populations and student support to address the work slated to be done. The instructional programming team was developed, and five positions were established to employ content experts that could provide guidance on the EBPs for districts. In addition, the data services team worked to redesign the EasyIEP system to ensure it was compatible and connected to the new initiatives. This meant rebuilding some of the processes by which the system operated and the format by which educators were able to complete special education documents. Text boxes became a focal point to encourage users to include thorough and student-specific details in their documents. Funds from the previous SPDG were used to provide large-scale trainings on RTI<sup>2</sup> in the 2013-14 school year and on IAIEPs in the 2014-15 school year.

The department also worked to align internal infrastructure and resources to create an effective and sustainable model of support for districts. Rather than the onus of the coherent improvement

strategies and their EBPs being placed solely on the division of special populations and student support, other divisions within the department were included in the preparation for the work to be done. The former division of curriculum and instruction worked with staff within the division of special populations and student support to communicate and train on RTI<sup>2</sup> and several members of the curriculum and instruction team were involved in the content development of the initiative. Additionally, members of the college, career, and technical education team have continued to be instrumental in sharing information about implementation of these EBPs in high school.

To support the work that still needs to be done relative to helping districts implement these strategies and their EBPs, the department will once again use the newly awarded SPDG. As discussed in the “Implementation Teams” section, through these funds three interventionists will be hired to support the three grand divisions of the state in the follow-up training to be offered to those districts selected to participate. These interventionists will be supported by state personnel and contracted support staff.

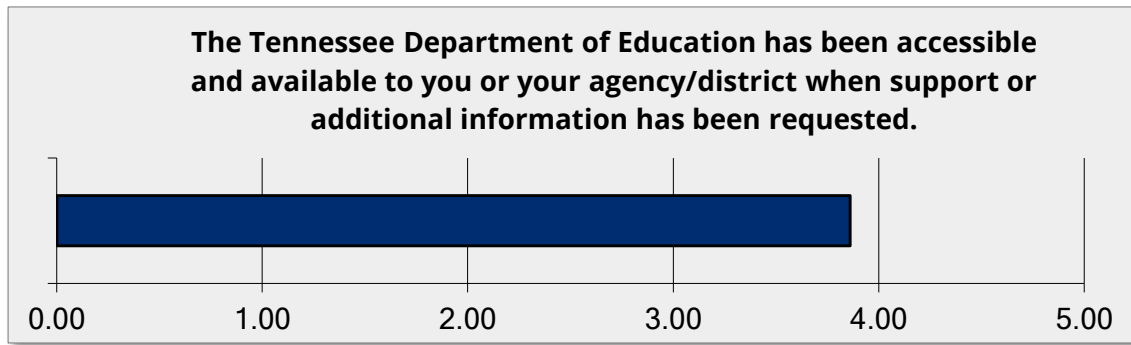


### *Initial Implementation*

Tennessee is in a unique situation with regard to the SSIP. Indeed, while Phase II is in many ways focused on the planning for initial implementation, all three coherent strategies and many of the related EBPs have already been implemented within the state. The RTI<sup>2</sup> initiative went into effect in July of 2014 and training on inclusionary practices and the differentiation of instruction began in the 2014-15 school year in concert with training on the writing of IAIEPs. In light of this, much of the initial implementation has already taken place or is currently underway.

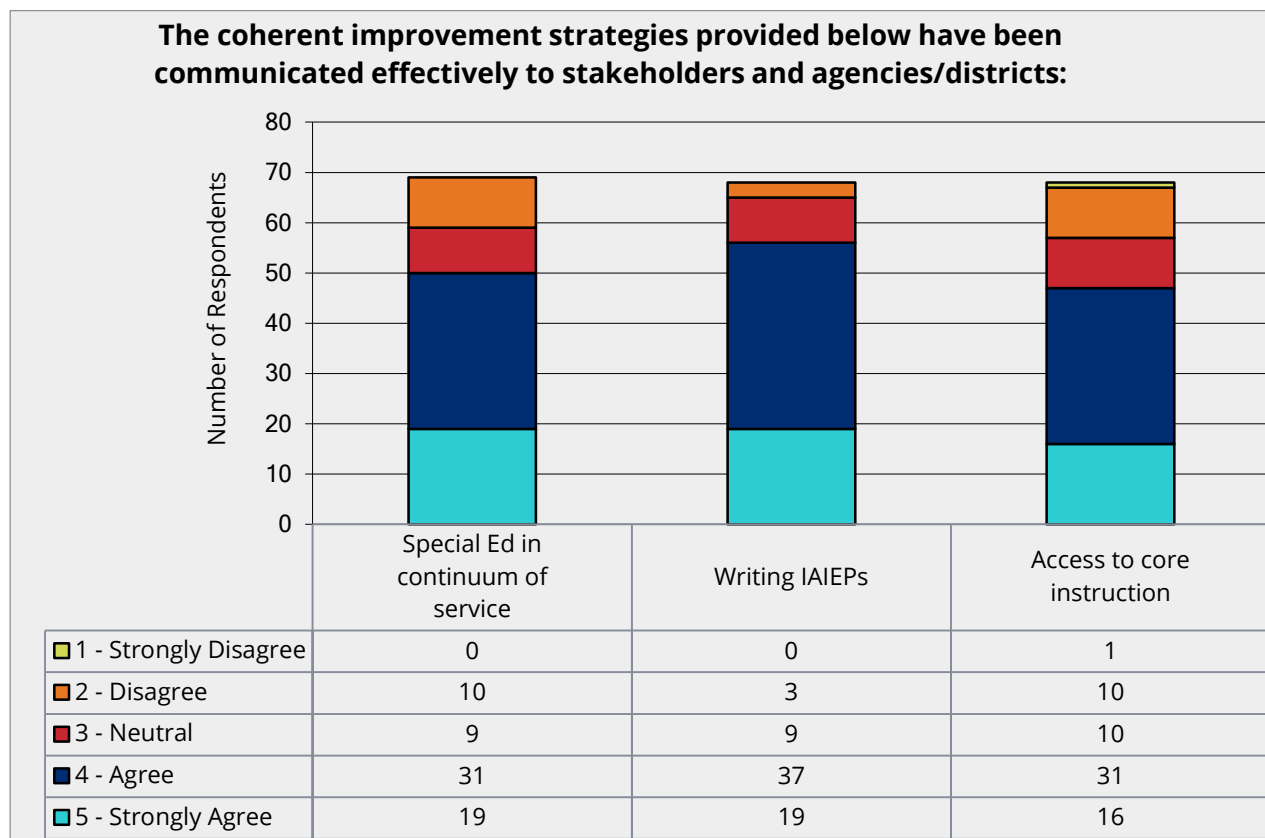
During this implementation, other divisions within the department assisted in training district staff. The division of curriculum and instruction provided guidance on RTI<sup>2</sup> at their conferences in 2014 that were able to reach both general education and special education teachers. Moreover, staff from the division of special populations and student support were able to provide training on differentiated instruction at these annual conferences. In the last year, CORE has taken more ownership in disseminating these EBPs to districts and providing them with technical assistance and professional development as needed. In addition, the division of college, career, and technical education has begun releasing trainings about RTI<sup>2</sup> implementation in high school.

Overall, many staff in districts across the state in a wide range of roles have felt supported by the department. Based on the SSIP survey sent out in the fall of 2015, the information below was gathered.

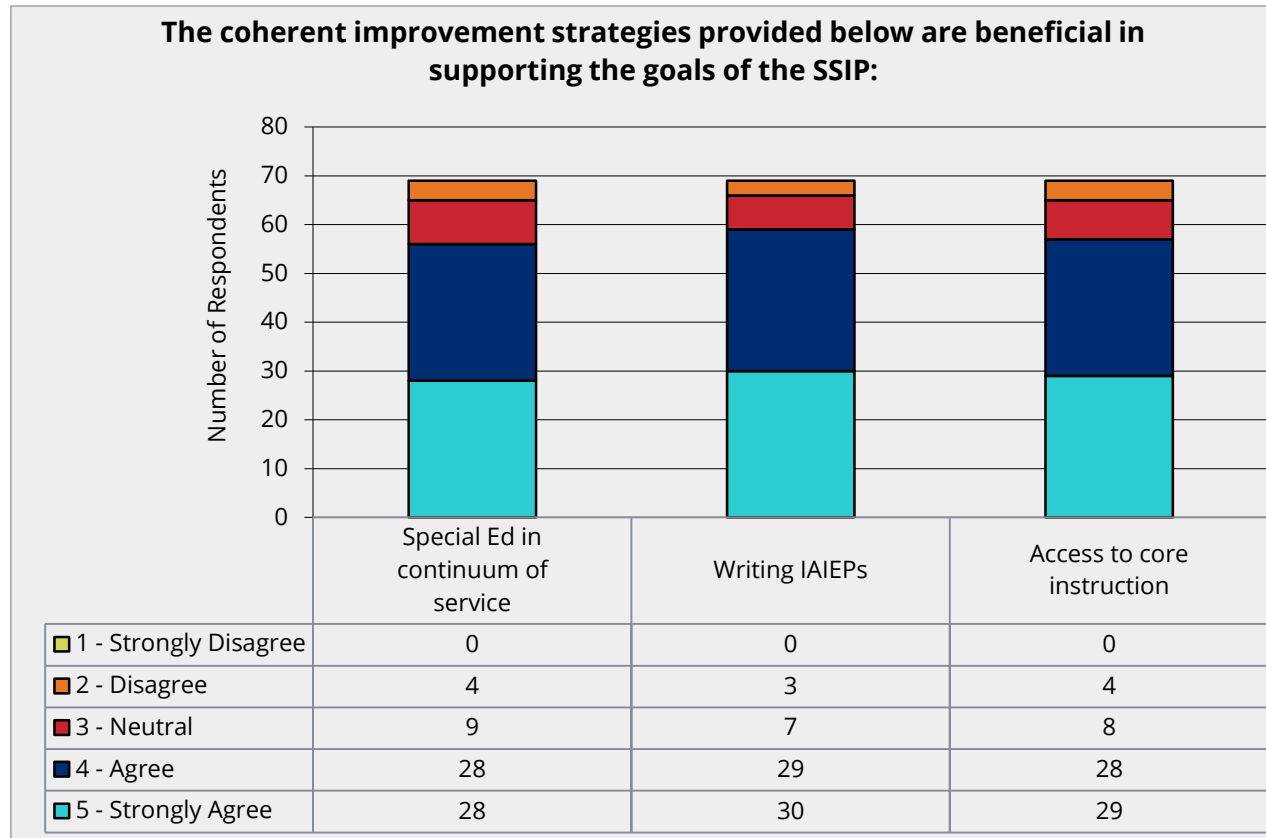


**Figure 2.9.** The average rating was 3.86 out of 5.0, with 54.55% of respondents agreeing 20.78% strongly agreeing

In this survey, respondents also answered questions relative to the communication of the coherent improvement strategies and how well they aligned with the SSIP.



**Figure 2.10.** Chart details whether the respondents felt coherent improvement strategies were effectively communicated to stakeholders and districts

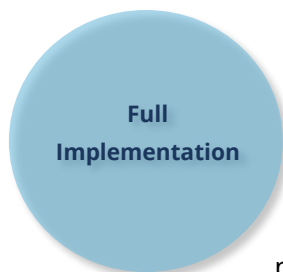


**Figure 2.11.** Chart details whether the respondents felt coherent improvement strategies support goals of the SSIP.

However, while these strategies were released over the last two years, there still remains a need to provide continuous support and coaching, to assess the success and efficacy of the strategies, and problem-solve any issues there might be with the strategies and/or their implementation. This is where the SPDG-funded work related to trainings that support the SSIP will be crucial.

The trainings and activities that will be funded by the SPDG will not begin until the summer of 2016. In light of this, this work is really not at the initial implementation stage. However, the trainings will address the lessons learned from the initial implementation of strategies released over the last several years. To be sure, the method of widespread trainings with no follow-up support or coaching has been a barrier to scaling up EBPs and led to mixed results, with some districts effectively implementing the strategies, while others struggle to maintain fidelity. Thus, the SPDG-funded trainings will be primarily focused on the follow-up support and coaching models to better sustain the work.





### *Full Implementation*

While the department is not currently at full implementation of all these strategies and their EBPs, the proposed activities over the next three to four years will ideally ensure successful full implementation in districts and schools across the state. This will start with the trainings and SSIP activities to be provided through the SPDG funds. The districts that are best able to continue refining their work and carry on effective implementation of strategies will serve as the initial test cohort to benefit from the SSIP activities. The success of this initial cohort will indicate whether the proposed trainings will be effective across the state. If the initial cohort does not demonstrate success, these districts will provide great baseline data to help identify areas upon which to improve. The goal is to refine and improve the trainings and supports to ensure they are beneficial to all districts in the coming years.

The three SPDG-funded interventionists who will continue to support districts and district level coaches will be instrumental in creating a feedback loop between the department and the districts. Those members of the district implementation team and school implementation teams will not only have access to two strands of training that address the coherent improvement strategies and their EBPs, but they also will be given multiple opportunities during the trainings to practice the newly taught skills using bridges to practice. The interventionists and academic coaches will observe the use of these skills and provide immediate feedback. In addition, interventionists will collect participants' written responses to case study questions and analyze responses to inform further training and support.

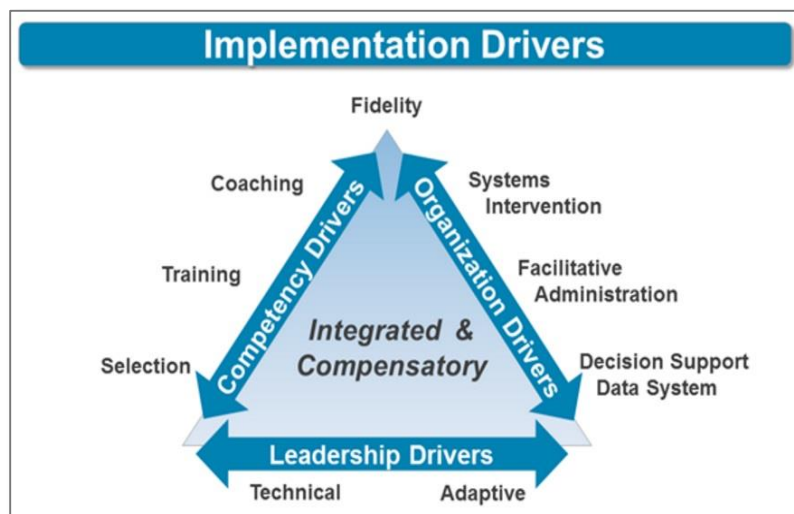
The department will create a training fidelity instrument<sup>55</sup> that interventionists and other SPDG-funded facilitators (e.g., members of the evaluation team, SPDG Partners, department staff) can use to ensure that training is implemented as intended and to provide information to both the project director and project managers concerning additional coaching that may be required. A similar instrument will be used by special education supervisors and district level coaches to assess participating educators' fidelity of implementation of strategies and interventions in the classroom. More information about this assessment of effectiveness and the connections with the SiMR are provided in the "Evaluation" component.

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<sup>55</sup> This instrument is currently being developed.

## Implementation Drivers

In the next phase of implementation science, the department began assessing the implementation drivers necessary to promote and sustain the coherent improvement strategies and their EBPs. As implementation drivers are used to ensure both implementation fidelity and a statewide culture of learning, they were extremely beneficial when fleshing out the training processes for the SSIP activities.



**Figure 2.12.** The three EBPs that address the coherent improvement strategy of utilizing special education in a continuum of service.



### Competency Drivers

These drivers will involve activities to develop and sustain the ability for district staff to establish EBPs. For the sake of the SPDG-funded trainings being done in the SSIP, the competency drivers will evaluate the districts being selected to participate in trainings. The four competency drivers are: selection, training, coaching, and performance assessment.

### Selection

Districts will apply to participate and applications will be preliminarily assessed using an established rubric.<sup>56</sup> The review of applications will be done by both CORE interventionists and staff on the state implementation team. The inclusion of CORE in the selection process was done intentionally to align the work being done on both teams. Since CORE serves as a direct resource for districts and is a member of the regional implementation team, it is imperative that the staff in these offices are engaged and knowledgeable about the work being done relative to the SSIP. This has been the communication in the department from the top down, and is manifest in the recent departmental restructures.

<sup>56</sup> A copy of this rubric, titled "Attachment 13 – SSIP Application Evaluation Rubric," has been attached under the "Phase 2 SSIP" tab in GRADS 360.

As outlined in the application evaluation rubric, a total of 12 points are possible to score on the application. A cutoff score of eight points was identified, and those districts scoring eight or more points on the application based on CORE and state implementation team staff review will be selected for participation. Applications selected will be assessed to ensure that the district has agreed to the set of assurances detailed in the “Implementation Team” section, and has the buy-in of the superintendent/director of schools, director of curriculum and instruction (or similar role), and the director of special education. This selection process is intended to identify districts that have the appropriate infrastructure in place to support additional SSIP activities and trainings.

A maximum of 50 districts can be selected through this process. The SPDG was written to accommodate this amount of districts in the trainings. Three of the 50 districts will be those serving as stakeholders in the writing of the SPDG: Gibson County Special School District, Metro Nashville Public Schools, and White County Schools. These districts will not have to apply for participation but will be selected by default based on their previous contributions and established infrastructure. The remaining districts were selected in mid-March 2016 (see additional information in the “Evaluation” component).

### **Training**

After districts have been notified of selection for participation, they will be required to identify the schools best equipped to participate in these activities and the department will provide consultation and guidance on school selection processes.<sup>57</sup> Because of the unique characteristics of each district, the department has not set a rigid requirement for the number of staff or schools that must participate. At a minimum, one school must be selected and be represented by three staff members from the school (principal, special education teacher, and general education teacher) and at least one of the schools selected must be an elementary or middle school to account for the 3-8 grade band being assessed in the SiMR. Beyond these minimum standards, selecting schools and staff for participation will be the prerogative of the district.

Once the districts have selected schools for participation in the work, they will be required to nominate an internal district academic coach to take the lead on supporting staff within the district. The SPDG-funded interventionists at the department also provide ongoing technical assistance and targeted professional development in years three through five of the SPDG to particularly to the coaches. In addition, the department will make online modules available on the SPDG website to allow access to

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<sup>57</sup> More information can be found in the “Implementation Team” section.

the training materials for those unable to attend the training sessions and teachers new to the district/school.

The special and general education teachers representing schools selected for implementation will be chosen by school and/or district staff during the planning process. They, in conjunction with the principal and special education director, will be required to attend trainings led by the academic coaches for the strand of training centered on increasing access to core instruction. The special education teachers and special education director will also participate in the second strand of training focused on providing special education as the most intensive intervention in a continuum of service. These team trainings will be very interactive and hands-on, asking staff to model the training components to facilitate feedback from interventionists and peers. This will be done to ensure that programs will be implemented with fidelity.

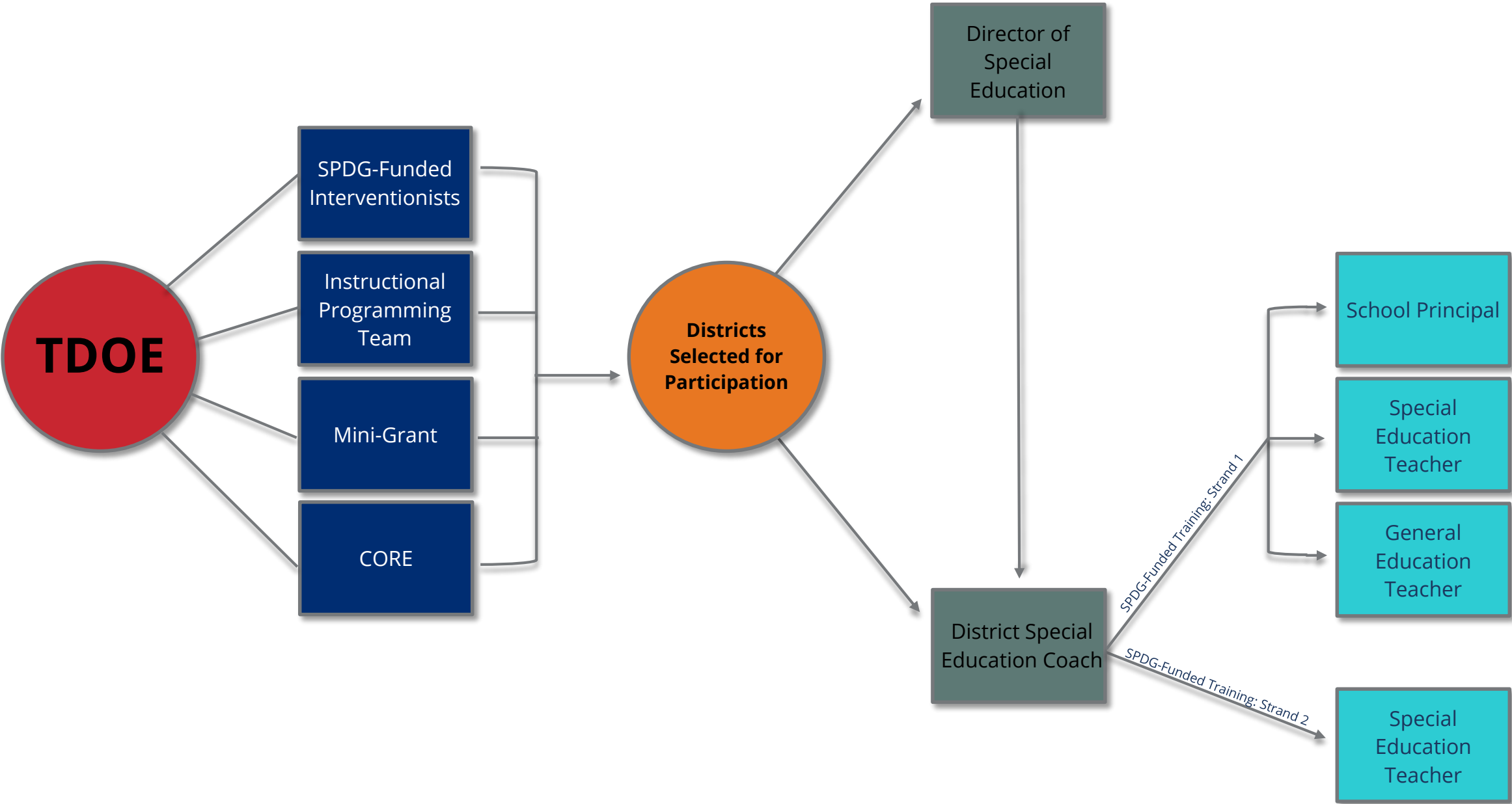
### Coaching

District staff will receive consistent supports and coaching from the department (SPDG-funded interventionists, instructional programming team, and CORE staff) throughout the implementation of SSIP activities. In addition, internal district academic coaches will be identified to serve as an additional branch of support to educators. These internal coaches will have the unique perspective of being a current educator in the districts selected with built-in relationships with staff. The coaches will participate in trainings from the department on the coherent improvement strategies and their EBPs and will be responsible for providing guidance and support to staff at the district and school level.

Coaches, like the school level teams, will also have the opportunity to participate in modeling trainings and receive critique and feedback from the SPDG-funded interventionists and peers. They will be able to reach out to the interventionists with concerns and will serve in many ways as the liaison between the teachers in the schools and district and the department. Figure 2.13 shows the flow of supports and resources that will be provided to selected districts.

In addition, the district will be able to purchase instructional materials to support the coaches and teachers through a mini-grant that will be awarded to districts selected for participation. The mini-grant will be ten thousand dollars to be used at the discretion of the district, as long as the items purchased are for the classroom and instruction.

# Flow of Supports



### Performance Assessment

As will be detailed in the “Evaluation” component, department personnel, in conjunction with SPDG-funded interventionists, will create or identify an existing implementation fidelity instrument to measure the progress of participants in implementing the strategies learned through the trainings. Special education supervisors will be provided training on the use of these instruments in order to sustain these fidelity monitoring efforts across the large number of anticipated participants. Communities of practice for special education supervisors in particular will be offered during the second year of the SPDG in order to build their capacity for continued monitoring the fidelity of implementation of the EBPs. The department will identify annual benchmarks of best practices that 80 percent of teachers are expected to meet after the first, second, and third years of implementation at the usability sites in the three districts that partnered with the state for the SPDG (Gibson County Special School District, Metro Nashville Public Schools, and White County Schools). Data from the observations at the usability sites will be provided to interventionists, the department, teachers, and administrators in order to inform needed changes to training and implementation efforts. The aggregated data will inform the community of practice meetings.



### *Organization Drivers*

These drivers will be used to develop infrastructures that encourage environments in which new programs can flourish. Likely these supports will need to be developed at the district and building levels for those districts selected to participate in SSIP

activities. The three organization drivers are: decision support data systems, facilitative administration, and systems intervention.

### Decision Support Data Systems

Availability of viable data systems will be necessary for selected districts to ensure that the trainings provided to staff are having a positive impact on teacher behavior and leading to improved student outcomes. The trainings will focus on having staff utilize progress monitoring data and other tools to make data-based decisions about what interventions may be necessary to support students. Because RTI<sup>2</sup> requires consistent progress monitoring, and the department reimburses districts selecting one of the three approved progress monitoring tools to defray costs, these instruments and data systems should already be in place in the district.

### Facilitative Administrative Supports

Each selected district will need to have facilitative administrators to ensure that the appropriate structures are in place to help the EBPs and trainings succeed in the classroom. The department hopes to mitigate situations in which the facilitative piece is missing by seeking the buy-in from key leadership positions across the district through the application for participation in SSIP activities. Neglecting this aspect of leadership and engagement could prove costly for the district and the students; indeed, without allocating resources and time to this work and reinforcing the messages espoused at the interventionist training sessions, the EBPs might prove impossible to establish with fidelity.

To support these administrators, the department will create a process and form to elicit feedback concerning challenges with implementation that administrators observe. The division of special populations and student support will analyze feedback from administrators and observation data regularly throughout the evaluation process (see “Evaluation” component for more information) to identify barriers and successes and make necessary changes, including revising policies and procedures in order to alleviate barriers and facilitate implementation. This approach will improve sustainability and safeguard access to training on an ongoing basis.

### Systems Intervention

It will be vital for district staff to have advanced knowledge of the data systems being used to monitor success and identify concerns or potential barriers. Should the curriculum and methodology taught at the trainings not lead to improved results for students, districts, in conjunction with the department, will need to make decisions about what should be altered. This is where the department level support will be so crucial to assist in decision-making about the implementation of EBPs and where revisions should be exacted. In the application process, the department will be looking for those districts that have responsive leaders who can identify and then find solutions to problems.



#### *Leadership Drivers*

These drivers relate to a role rather than a specific person. District and school leadership can support the success of the SSIP initiative by ensuring high fidelity and sustainable program implementation at their sites. These leaders will be crucial to spearhead the being done relative to the SSIP activities. They will also need to understand the staff and resources in their district to identify the best candidate to serve as an academic coach. The two primary leadership drivers are technical and adaptive.

### Technical

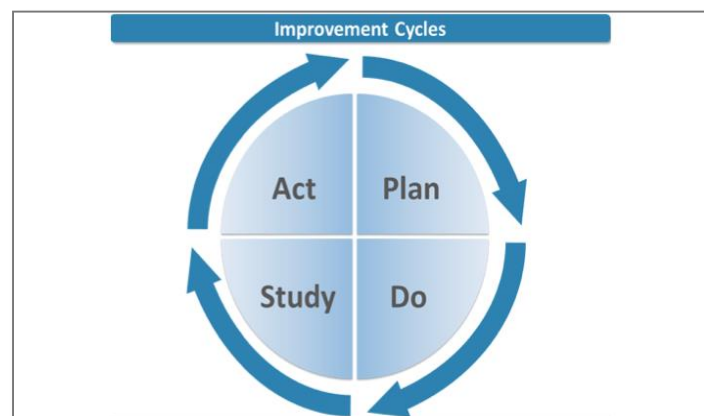
This form of leadership requires that district leaders understand the scope of work that will be undertaken in the SSIP activities and implementation of EBPs at the school and classroom level. Such leaders will need to have a comprehensive understanding of where the district currently is and to where the district wants to be. This information is intended to be elicited in the application for participation. In SSIP activities, leaders will need to be engaged in the district and provide positive support to district staff for the SSIP initiative to be successful.

### Adaptive

This form of leadership requires influential district leaders to be engaged in the mission of the work and EBPs outlined in the SSIP. As well, these leaders will need to be willing to make necessary modifications or adaptations to the status quo, even if the changes might be unpopular or inconvenient. These leaders should be engaged with their staff and have access to those at the classroom level to understand the successes or concerns these practitioners might have. Feedback must consistently be solicited in order for improvement, and thus these leaders must allow for feedback mechanisms to be established and routinely used. Adaptive leaders will be sought by the department when conducting reviews of applications for participation.

### *Improvement Cycles*

This final phase of implementation science will be pivotal, as it addresses how the hard work necessary to achieve the SiMR will be executed and tracked. While it is important to establish implementation teams, develop usable interventions, consider stages of implementation, and hone in on crucial implementation



**Figure 2.14.** The connection of the four improvement cycles.

drivers, it is absolutely imperative that there is a disciplined process and feedback loop in place to assess all these components and potentially adjust the work based on the short-term and intermediate outcomes. Change is no simple feat. The department has been extremely conscientious in identifying potential barriers to the adoption of coherent improvement strategies and has confirmed that plans are in place to continuously evaluate the success of the



work. The four cycles of improvement – plan, do, study, and act – were considered throughout this work.



### *Plan*

Much of the planning work was done during Phase I, particularly the identification of barriers and challenges. To be sure, several barriers were prominent during Phase I, such as structural concerns with CORE teams, concerns with buy-in at the district level, a disconnect between the division of special populations and student support and other divisions in the department, and the limited capacity of the implementation team leading the SSIP work. As specified in the “Infrastructure Development” component and the “Do” section below, the department has made efforts to address these challenges.

Several measures will be considered when evaluating the efficacy of the SSIP. Evaluation of the SPDG-funded trainings intended to support selected districts will be crucial, and a specific set of instruments will be developed in conjunction with HDI from the University of Kentucky to evaluate effectiveness of training, fidelity of implementation of practices in the classroom, and the student outcomes for those teachers participating the activities. These evaluation metrics will yield results about the work being done to increase access to core instruction and address special education in a continuum of service.

There will also continue to be assessments of IEPs to ensure they are being written to address skill deficits so that special educators can intervene on deficit areas and students can successfully participate in the general education setting to learn state-identified academic standards. A rubric<sup>58</sup> has been used to assess randomly selected IEPs in districts throughout the state, and staff on the instructional programming team within the division of special populations and student support have conducted several evaluation cycles. They will continue to do this annually for the coming years of the SSIP.

Evaluations will need to be done over the next several years to assess whether Tennessee is making progress toward achieving its SiMR, which is increasing by three percent annually the percentage of students with an SLD in grades 3-8 scoring at or above basic on the statewide ELA assessment. The statewide ELA assessment will be the primary measure used to assess

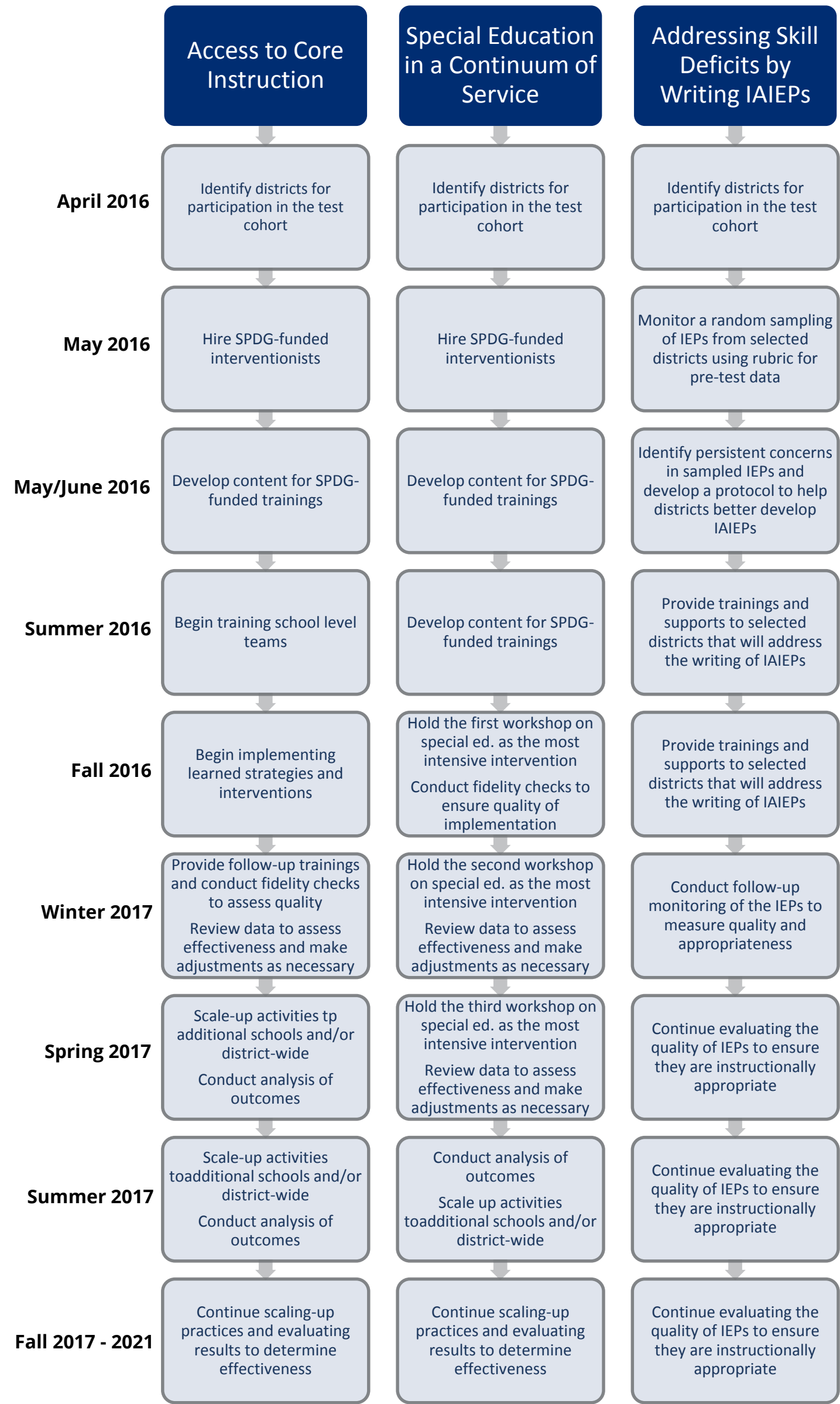
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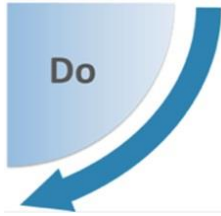
<sup>58</sup> A copy of this rubric, titled “Attachment 14 – IEP Review Rubric,” has been attached under the “Phase 2 SSIP” tab in GRADS 360.

progress. To reach this ultimate end goal, however, there are many short- and long-term activities to be navigated. In the theory of action shared in Phase I, a brief breakdown of these activities was provided. Figure 2.14 below provides in-depth details about these activities and the timeline for completion. Note that these timelines are contingent upon the release of the SPDG funds that still have yet to be approved for use by the Tennessee legislature.

Figure 2.15

Activities Timeline





### *Do*

Through identification of these challenges in Phase I, the department was able to address and abate some of the concerns noted. Indeed, while not yet perfect, work with CORE has markedly improved. The CORE interventionists have become more cognizant of the work being done to support SWDs and have received consistent training on the initiatives to better serve districts. This improved support from both the division of special populations and student support in conjunction with CORE has been beneficial for districts, who are more readily getting help and guidance on coherent improvement strategies and their EBPs from the department and regional offices.

Importantly, districts will now have the ability through the SSIP activities, to access more in-depth support from the department. The coaching system that will be developed throughout these trainings will ensure that districts receive the follow-up support and guidance they need. The positive results anticipated should also promote buy-in from districts. Indeed, if districts selected to participate in these SSIP trainings and activities experience success, other districts will become engaged in the work too. This will be beneficial as the department works over the coming years to scale-up activities statewide.

In addition, the realignment of the department has reduced the risk of disconnects between academic divisions, because the division of special populations and student support is now housed with all other academic teams. The new strategic plan was written to complement this structural change by specifically honing in on the initiatives and work underway for SWDs. Procurement of the SPDG has afforded the department the opportunity to expand supports for districts by hiring three new SPDG-funded interventionists. Having these three new staff members will increase the capacity of the team and address concerns about gaps in support between the department staff and districts. This work, based on information gleaned in the planning cycle, has made it possible for the department to attenuate structural barriers stymying the success of SSIP.

During this improvement cycle, the department will also begin implementing the work outlined in Figure 2.14. The timelines may be subject to change based on several factors, including the release of the SPDG funds to begin the trainings and changes to the statewide assessment that may require a resetting of the baseline data. However, the department is confident that planned activities are feasible and that the appropriate supports are in place to reach the ambitious goals outlined in the SiMR.



### *Study and Act*

The department recognizes that while planning and implementing changes statewide are key elements in the improvement cycle, the study and act components are equally vital. Indeed, both of these phases in the cycle ensure that what is being implemented is in fact an improvement (study) and should be continued (act). If things are not improving (study), then the department must make a conscious decision to rethink the work being done and develop a more effective model (act). Without this feedback loop, it is difficult to know if improvements are occurring and if the work should

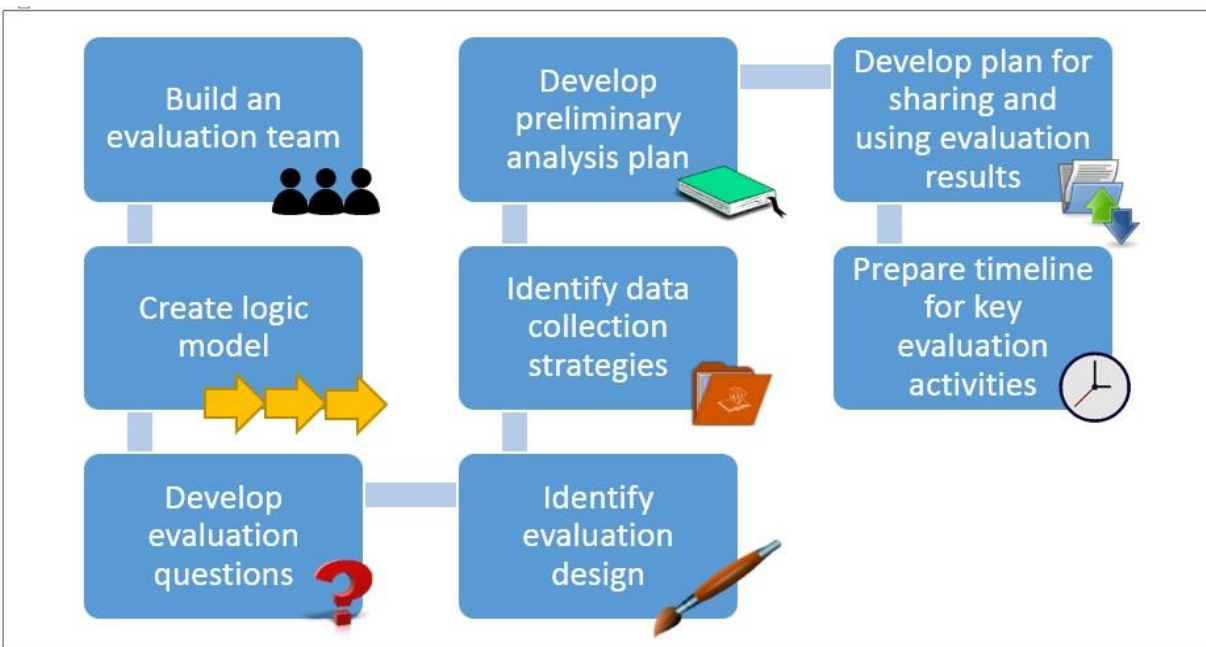
continue or be modified.

The department decided to provide the SPDG-funded trainings to a select cohort of districts, as research in improvement science supports<sup>59</sup> that the smaller the sample, the easier it is to begin the improvement cycles and assess results. Indeed, if the planning and doing do not yield positive outcomes when studying results, it is easier to act and modify the work being done with a select group rather than with the entire state. More information on the study and act phases of the improvement cycle can be found in the “Evaluation” component.

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<sup>59</sup> Anthony S. Bryk, “Accelerating How We Learn to Improve,” *Education Researcher* 44, no. 9 (December 2015): 467–477.

The study and act phases of the improvement cycles detailed in the “Support for Implementation of EBPs” component finally come to fruition in the evaluation phase. With the planning completed and the work being implemented across the state, the natural course of action is assessing what is being implemented, determining if it is being implemented with fidelity and is indeed effective, and, if it is not, taking steps to improve the implementation. To develop an evaluation plan, the department utilized an eight step process by which all factors crucial for effective evaluation were considered. The following steps include:



Each of these steps have been seminal in finalizing a plan that appropriately includes and evaluates short- and long-term objectives for the implementation of the SSIP activities, as well as short- and long-term objectives for progress toward the SiMR.

The department has decided to allocate its resources and efforts toward evaluating the results of coherent improvement strategies and evidence-based practices (EBPs) on academic outcomes for SWDs in the districts selected for participation in SPDG-funded activities. These activities outlined in the SPDG were directly aligned to the work detailed in the SSIP to ensure a successful marriage of the two programs. The smaller sample size for evaluation will allow the

department to better hone in on and thoroughly assess whether new practices are being implemented with fidelity in districts that have the appropriate infrastructure in place to support such practices. The evaluation questions and metrics are intended to be scaled up to all districts across the state in the coming years of SSIP implementation. However, for Phase II and the first year in Phase III, the department will be focused on this smaller cohort.

Through cross-teaming between the division of special populations and student support staff and CORE staff in March 2016, 27 districts (out of the 38 that applied to participate) have tentatively been selected for participation in the SSIP activities. These districts were identified based on the rubric utilized for application evaluation (further details in the “District Support” component). To qualify for participation, districts had to score 8 out of the 12 possible points based on the application rubric. The SPDG partner districts – Gibson County Special Schools, Metro Nashville Public Schools, and White County Schools – will also be participating in the activities.

All 30 districts provisionally selected for participation represent a diverse sampling of the state. The districts include those ranging from very small (<1,000 students) to very large (>30,000 students) and represent the landscape of Tennessee by including those spanning from rural to urban districts. The three grand divisions of Tennessee are also all represented to ensure that the geographical location of selected districts reflects the state as a whole.



### ***Step 1: Build an Evaluation Team***

There are a multitude of members on the SSIP evaluation team who are experts in the planned SSIP activities that are the focus of the evaluation. The diversity of the evaluation team reflects the unique characteristics of all the work being done to implement the SSIP and achieve the SiMR. Team members were identified to address the coherent improvement strategies and their EBPs.

The following people will be included on the evaluation team for the SSIP as whole:

- **David McKay.** David is a senior research with the Human Development Institute (HDI) at the University of Kentucky. He will conduct the program evaluation for the SPDG work, which directly overlaps with the work being done in the SSIP for two of the coherent improvement strategies.
- **Chithra Adams.** Chithra is the director of evaluation for HDI at the University of Kentucky. She will work with David to evaluate the strands of training that will be funded by the SPDG and utilized in the SSIP.

- **Donna Parker.** Donna is serving as the SPDG project co-manager and has nearly 40 years of experience working with special education programs in Tennessee. She is currently contracted with the University of Tennessee, Center for Literacy, Employment, and Education and she will have oversight of the SPDG-funded interventionist activities and trainings.
- **Theresa Nicholls.** Theresa is the director of special education eligibility and manages the SPDG work being done in the state. She will be assisting in the implementation of the coherent improvement strategies and will be a critical team member when evaluating whether the SPDG-funded SSIP activities are yielding the desired results/outcomes.
- **Rachel Wilkinson.** Rachel is the director of data services. She manages the statewide IEP data management system, EasyIEP, and is able to query systems across the state to see the percent of the day in which students are inside the general education setting. This data can be disaggregated in a variety of ways, including by disability category, so it will be a valuable way to see if teachers are writing IEPs that promote inclusionary practices. Her data team also gathers and aggregates data related to referrals for special education and she will be able to provide crucial data during the evaluation phase to address all coherent improvement strategies and the SiMR.
- **Tie Hodack.** Tie is the executive director of instructional programming. She manages a team of special education specialists who provide supports and trainings for districts across the state. She and one of her team members have predominantly led the work on RTI<sup>2</sup> and the writing of instructionally appropriate IEPs (IAIEPs). She will be instrumental in assessing the results around the skills deficits improvement strategy and the IAIEP EBP.
- **Robbie Mitchell.** Robbie is the executive director of academic strategy and operations. She has been instrumental in work relative to the coherent improvement strategy of access to core instruction and will have insight into the evaluation of this strategy.
- **Alison Gauld.** Alison is the low incidence and behavior coordinator. She has been active in training on and evaluating the writing of IAIEPs.
- **Jill Omer.** Jill is the speech, language, and autism coordinator. She has been active in training on and evaluating the writing of IAIEPs.
- **Blake Shearer.** Blake is the high school intervention and transition coordinator. He has been active in training on and evaluating the writing of IAIEPs.
- **Joann Lucero.** Joann is the reading intervention specialist. She has been active in training on and evaluating the writing of IAIEPs.
- **Ryan Mathis.** Ryan is the math intervention specialist. He has been active in training on and evaluating the writing of IAIEPs.
- **Collaboration for Effective Educator Development, Accountability, and Reform (CEEDAR) Center Grant Participants.** Outside of SPDG-funded staff and department staff, Tennessee will also be engaging the three universities participating in Tennessee's CEEDAR Center grant activities, Vanderbilt University, University of Memphis – Lambeth, and University of Tennessee – Knoxville. These stakeholders will serve as focus group team members in the evaluation process. The results of the evaluation will be shared with stakeholder staff from these universities to talk through the results being found and how to address areas of concern. As they lead the charge of educating teachers for the workforce, these stakeholders' knowledge and input will be invaluable. As well, they



will benefit from learning about the work being done statewide to help prepare educators in their programs.

- **SPDG District Partners.** The three districts serving as SPDG partners (Gibson Special School District, Metro Nashville Public Schools, and White County Schools) will be engaged throughout the evaluation process as well. They will weigh in on the results of the evaluations being conducted and help assess whether changes or adjustments may be required. They will also offer the unique district perspective as staff implementing the work being done.

### ***Access to Core Instruction***

The following members of the evaluation team will investigate whether inclusion of SWDs in the general education setting achieves both short- and long-term goals delineated in subsequent sections:

- *David McKay*
- *Chithra Adams*
- *Donna Parker*
- *Theresa Nicholls*
- *Rachel Wilkinson*
- *Robbie Mitchell*
- *CEEDAR Center grant staff*
- *SPDG district partners*

### ***Special Education in a Continuum of Service***

The following members of the evaluation team will investigate whether utilizing a continuum of service model in which special education is the most intensive intervention achieves both short- and long-term goals delineated in subsequent sections:

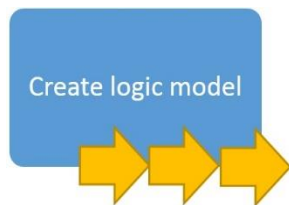
- *David McKay*
- *Chithra Adams*
- *Donna Parker*
- *Theresa Nicholls*
- *Rachel Wilkinson*
- *CEEDAR Center grant staff*
- *SPDG district partners*

### ***Addressing Skill Deficits***

The following members of the evaluation team will investigate whether addressing student skill deficits in IEPs and in instruction achieves the short- and long-term goals delineated in subsequent sections:

- *Tie Hodack*
- *Rachel Wilkinson*

- Alison Gauld
- Jill Omer
- Blake Shearer
- Joann Lucero
- Ryan Mathis
- CEEDAR Center grant staff
- SPDG district partners



## Step 2: Create a Logic Model

In Phase I, the department developed a detailed theory of action to visually represent the work being developed to achieve the SiMR. Figure 3.2 illustrates the planned coherent improvement strategies identified by the department and shares the broad outcomes that are expected based on implementation of the strategies.

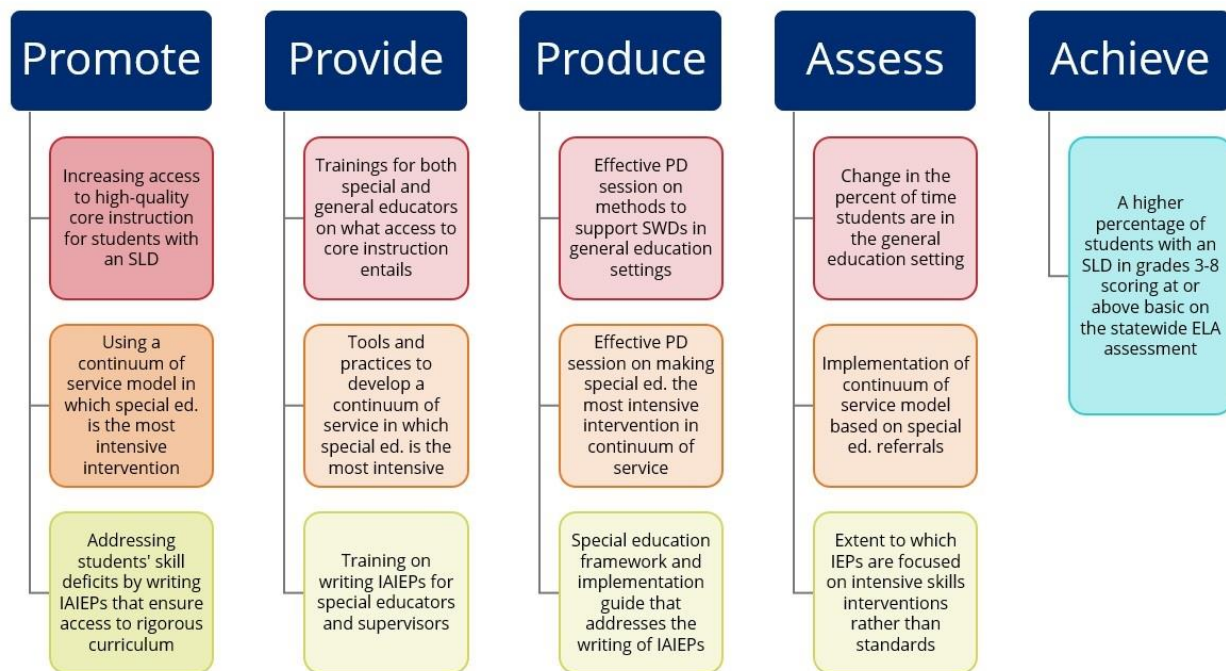


Figure 3.2. The detailed theory of action developed in Phase I.

While this theory of action is valuable to briefly assess the department's overall plan for improvement, a logic model is essential to better explicate how the work will be done to achieve the SiMR. This includes consideration of the necessary inputs, strategies used attain the SiMR, activities developed in response to the strategies, and the short-term and intermediate outcomes anticipated.

## *Inputs*

The department has identified numerous resources to help bring the SSIP theory of action to life in Tennessee. Human capital is a crucial resource to consider, and fortunately the department has a strong cadre of staff who are knowledgeable about the improvement strategies and associated EPBs included in the SSIP. The newly restructured department is now better aligned to capitalize on the acumen of staff not only within the division of special populations and student support but in other academic realms. This decreases the burden of work placed on staff within special populations and students support, and allows for insights and contributions from academic experts.

Additional staff members will be added in the coming months, which will increase capacity further. These added staff will be funded by the State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG), and they will be responsible for educating districts on the strategies included in the SSIP, providing supports as needed, and assisting in the SSIP evaluation process.

The award of the SPDG was quite a boon for the department, as it afforded the opportunity to link financial support to the work being done in the SSIP. The department intentionally aligned the scope of work detailed in the SPDG application to the plan outlined in Phase I of the SSIP. Financial support is of course imperative to sustain and grow a project, and the SPDG is intended to do just that for the SSIP related activities. In addition to funding three new interventionist positions, the SPDG will also provide the financial means for the state to offer specific strands of training for districts who apply and are selected for participation in these activities. These strands of training are linked to two of the coherent improvement strategies outlined in the SSIP. Costs of supplies for trainings, locations, and stipends for attendees will all be covered by the SPDG. In addition, evaluators of the trainings (and thus the SSIP strategies) will be financed through the SPDG funds. This alleviates the burden on state staff of evaluating all programs associated with the coherent improvement strategies. Additionally, the SPDG provides for engagement with the parent advocacy group, STEP (Support and Training for Exceptional Parents). This agency will have a major role in connecting the work being done relative to the SSIP with parents and members of the community.

The insight and guidance from stakeholders was an invaluable asset during Phase I of the SSIP and contributed to the identification of the SiMR and the coherent improvement strategies. In Phase II, stakeholders have helped determine how to implement the strategies, and then how to evaluate the work being done. These stakeholders include district superintendents, educators, related services providers, advocates, special education supervisors, school

administrators, and parents of children with disabilities. The department has reached out to stakeholders throughout the phases of the SSIP, from sharing the results of data and infrastructure analysis and soliciting input relative to these results to working together to solidify the SiMR. Presentations have been offered at several conferences to address this work and solicit feedback. Communications about the work being done have been disseminated to stakeholders through district updates, parent updates, and the state website. In addition to these modes of communication, the department has also reached out to stakeholders by inviting them on task forces to address potential strategies and their EBPs. Such task forces have laid the foundation for several initiatives.

A survey was disseminated last fall to further improve engagement with stakeholders and ensure that communication about the SSIP was adequately being delivered. Further comment was sought through this survey to address the major components of Phase II, including questions about how effective the current infrastructure of the department was in light of the scope of the SSIP and how well the identified coherent improvement strategies align to the SiMR and if they were appropriately communicated. Respondents were also encouraged to develop potential evaluation questions to consider in the plan.

## Strategies

Based on these inputs, the department was able to identify coherent improvement strategies to be used in the SSIP. These strategies are the first piece of the detailed theory of action, and include: 1) increasing access to core instruction; 2) utilizing a continuum of service model in which special education is the most intensive intervention; and 3) addressing students' skill deficits. To support these strategies, the department has identified specific evidence-based practices (EBPs). These EBPs have been broken out in Figure 3.3.

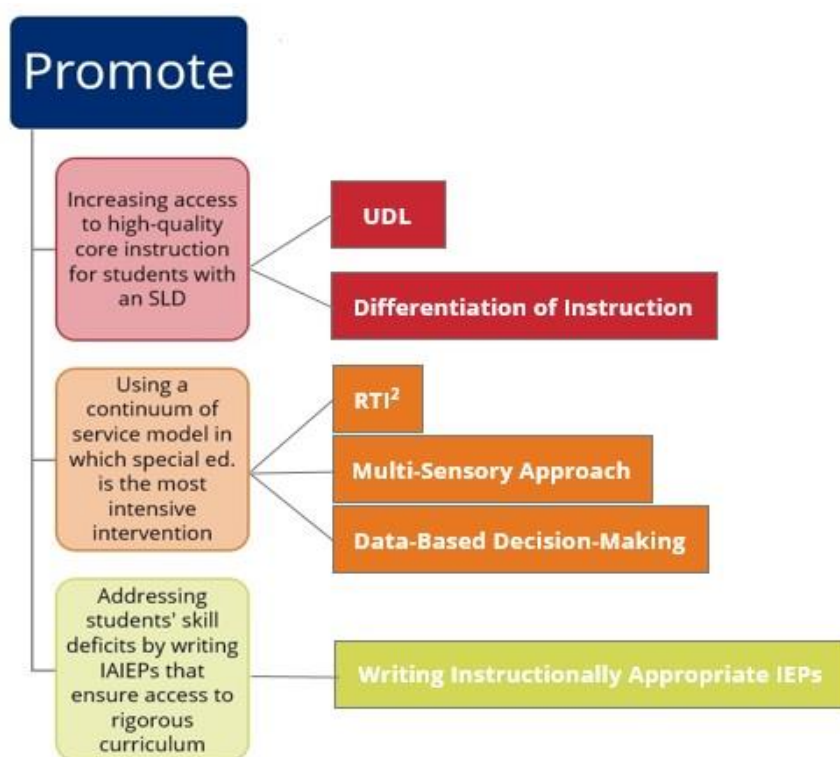


Figure 3.3. The coherent improvement strategies and their EBPs.

## Activities

The detailed theory of action plan specifies the activities necessary for each of the coherent improvement strategies in order to achieve the SiMR. The EBPs for each strategy will be imperative to accomplish these activities. The activities are broken out in Figure 3.4, and while they delineate how the strategies are going to be implemented, there are also more specific activities for the “provide,” “produce,” and “assess” phases. These activities have been broken out as “preliminary steps” in Figures 3.5, 3.6, and 3.7.

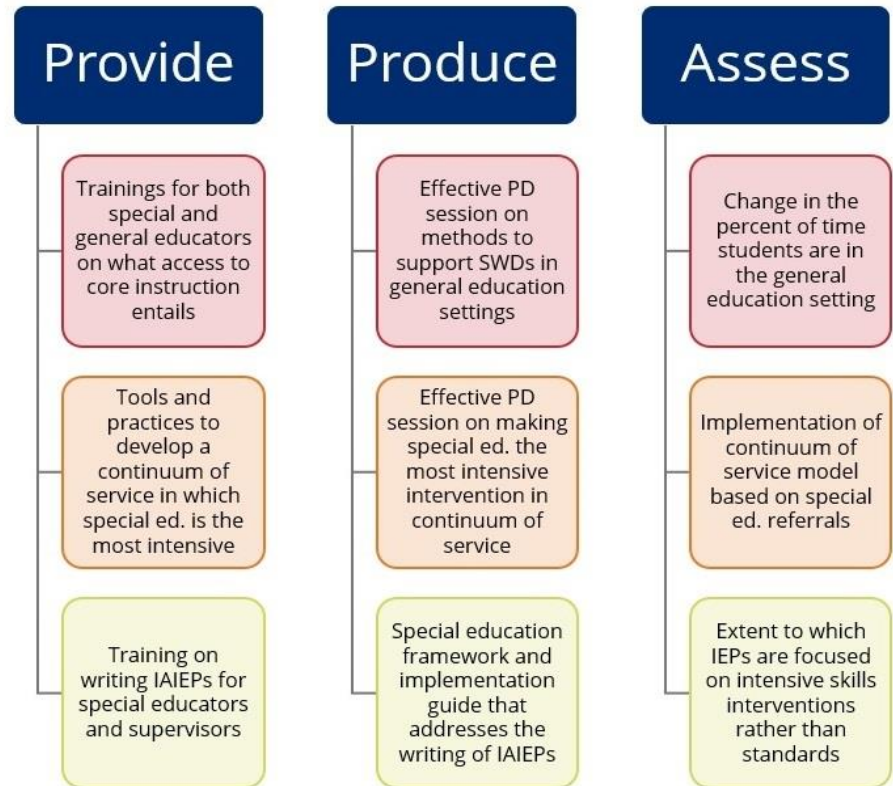
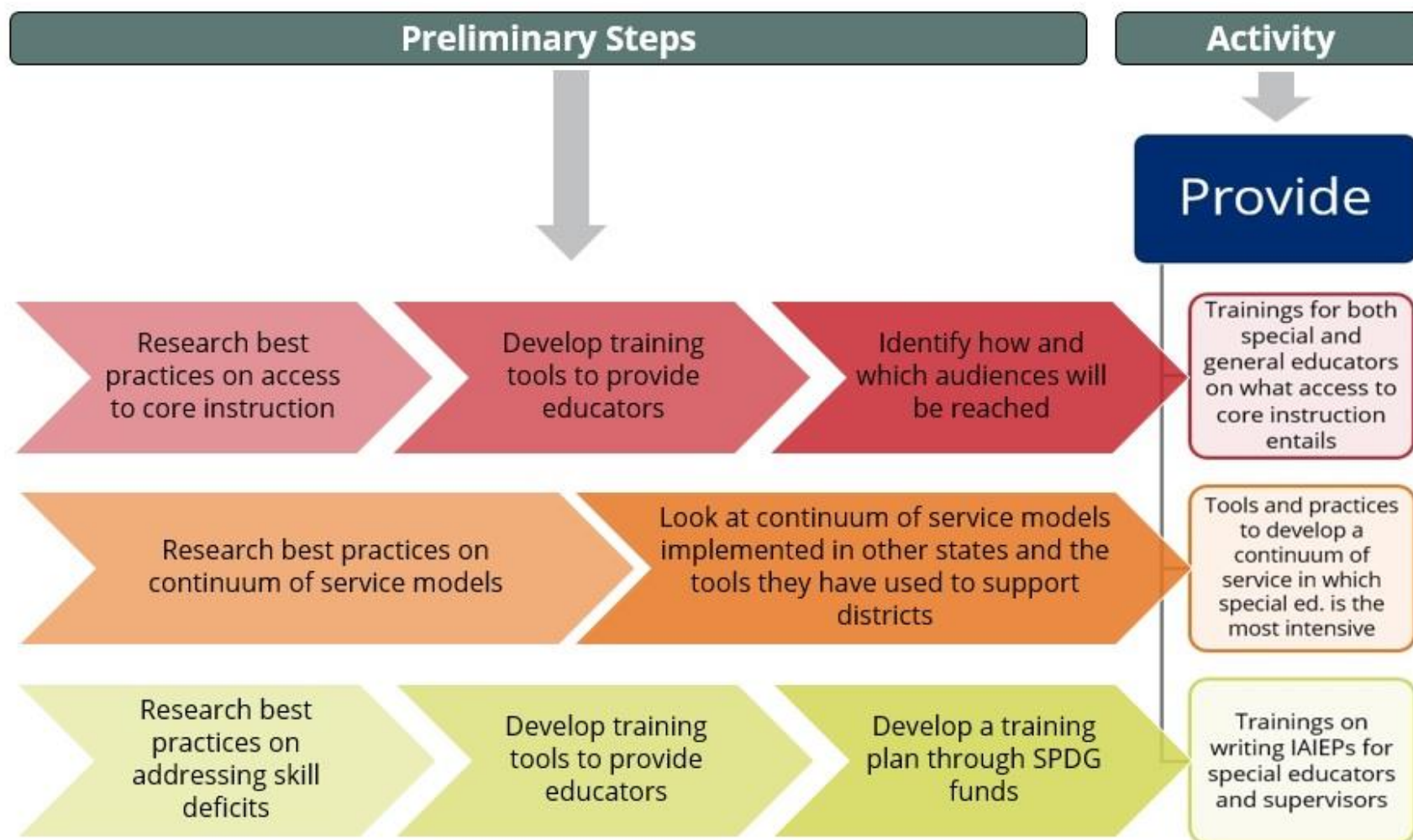


Figure 3.4. The activities outlined within the theory of action.



## Provide

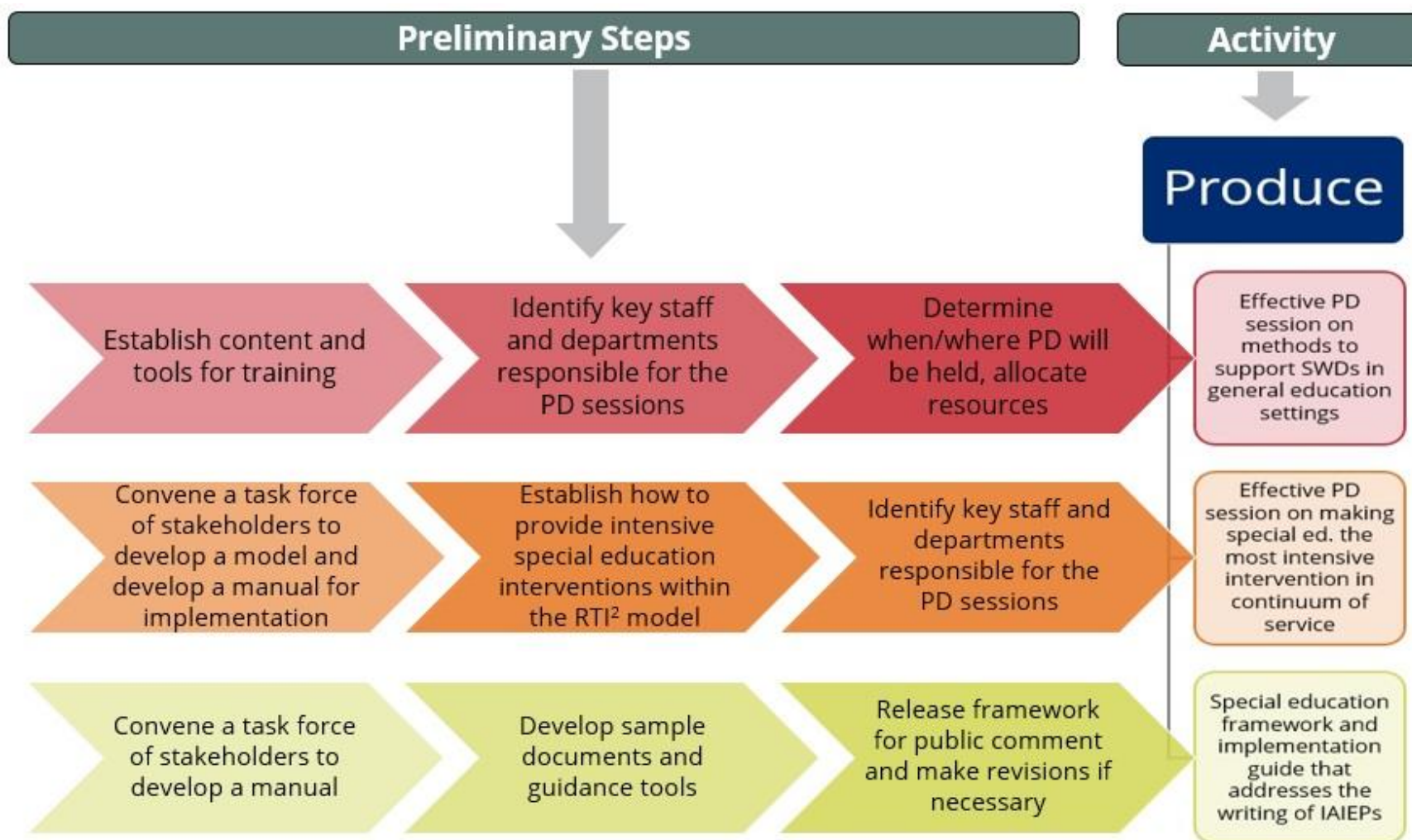
Figure 3.5 specifies the steps necessary to complete each of the activities outlined in this phase of the theory of action.



**Figure 3.5.** The preliminary steps necessary to achieve the activities detailed in the “provide” phase.

## Produce

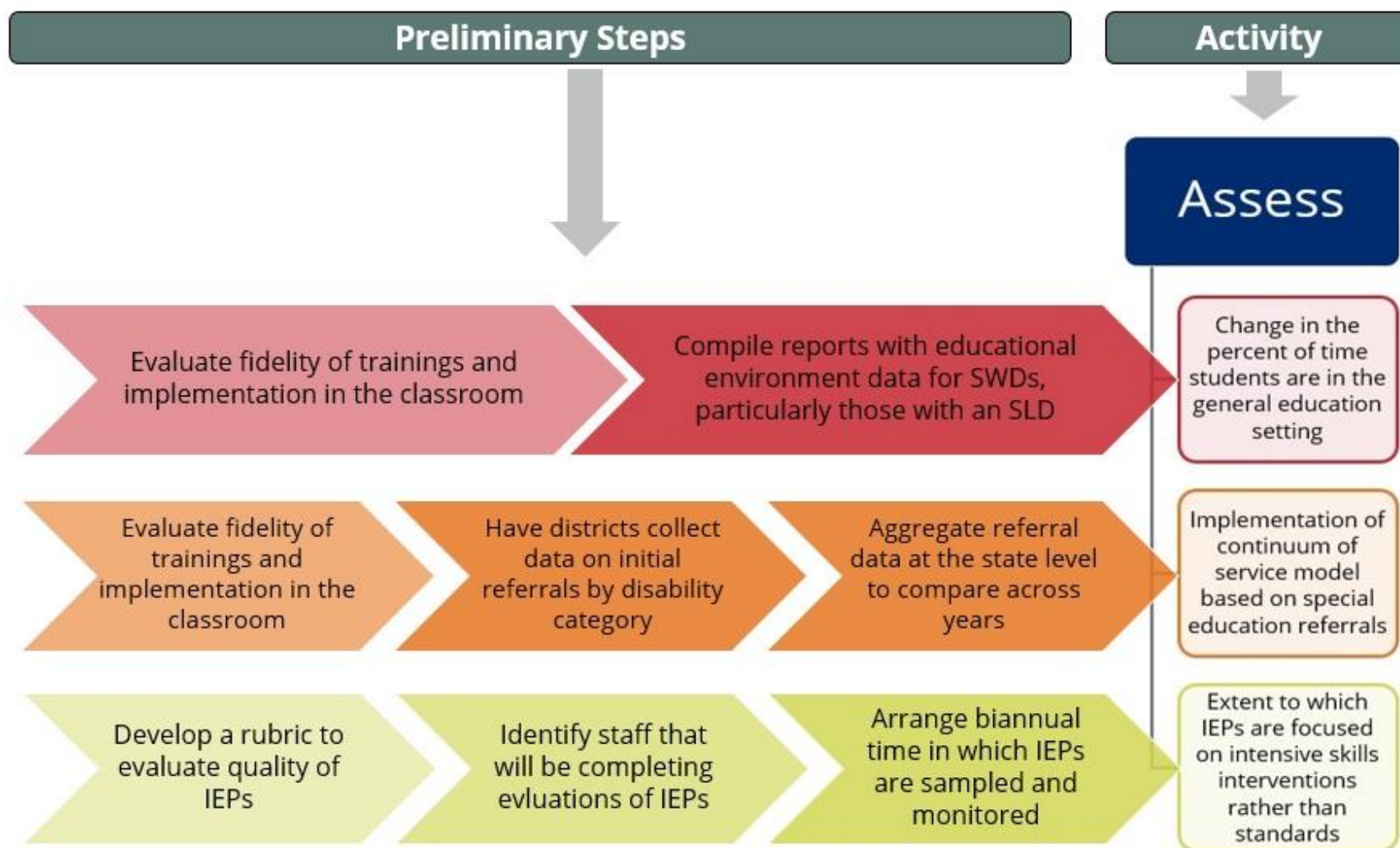
Figure 3.6 specifies the steps necessary to complete each of the activities outlined in this phase of the theory of action.



**Figure 3.6.** The preliminary steps necessary to achieve the activities detailed in the “produce” phase.

## Assess

Figure 3.7 specifies the steps necessary to complete each of the activities outlined in this phase of the theory of action.



**Figure 3.7.** The preliminary steps necessary to achieve the activities detailed in the “assess” phase.



## ***Outcomes***

While the ultimate goal of the preliminary actions, activities, and coherent improvement strategies is to achieve the SiMR, the short-term and intermediate outcomes are also imperative for the evaluation process. Indeed, these outcomes represent the expected results of the work being done. Failure to reach these outcomes signifies that the department is not on the positive trajectory intended by the strategies. Thus, assessment of these outcomes is essential to get a pulse on whether what is being implemented is being implemented with fidelity and moreover is actually working. There are both short-term and intermediate outcomes for each of the three coherent improvement strategies based on the preliminary actions and activities within each.

### ***Short-Term Outcomes***

#### **Access to Core Instruction**

- Educators attending trainings have an improved understanding of why SWDs need access to core instruction
- Educators attending PD sessions have increased knowledge about the EBPs of UDL and differentiation of instruction

#### **Special Education in a Continuum of Service**

- Staff have an increased understanding of tools and practices related to continuum of service models based on trainings provided
- Staff attending PD sessions have increased knowledge about the EBPs of RTI<sup>2</sup>, making data-based decisions, and using a multi-sensory approach

#### **Addressing Skill Deficits**

- Staff attending trainings have an improved understanding of what makes IEPs instructionally appropriate
- Staff attending trainings have increased knowledge about the EBP of writing IAIEPs that address skill deficits

### ***Intermediate Outcomes***

#### **Access to Core Instruction**

- Students with an SLD in grades 3-8, are benefiting from the supports learned by educators at training and PD sessions by demonstrating improved outcomes
- The percent of students with an SLD in grades 3-8 with access to core instruction for 80 percent or more of the day will increase from the baseline data gathered in 2015-16

#### **Special Education in a Continuum of Service**

- Districts are implementing the continuum of service models in schools using the tools and practices provided in trainings and outlined in the RTI<sup>2</sup> manual

- Special education is being used as the most intensive intervention (e.g. through a multi-sensory approach)
- Data-based decision-making is being employed by educators implementing RTI<sup>2</sup> and special education
- This multi-tiered model of support will lead to the percentage of students referred for an SLD based on annual referrals not increasing from the baseline established in the 2014-15 school year.

### Addressing Skill Deficits

- Staff attending trainings have an improved understanding of what makes IEPs instructionally appropriate
- Staff attending trainings have an improved understanding of how to write IAIEPs and address skill deficits

### Long-Term Outcomes

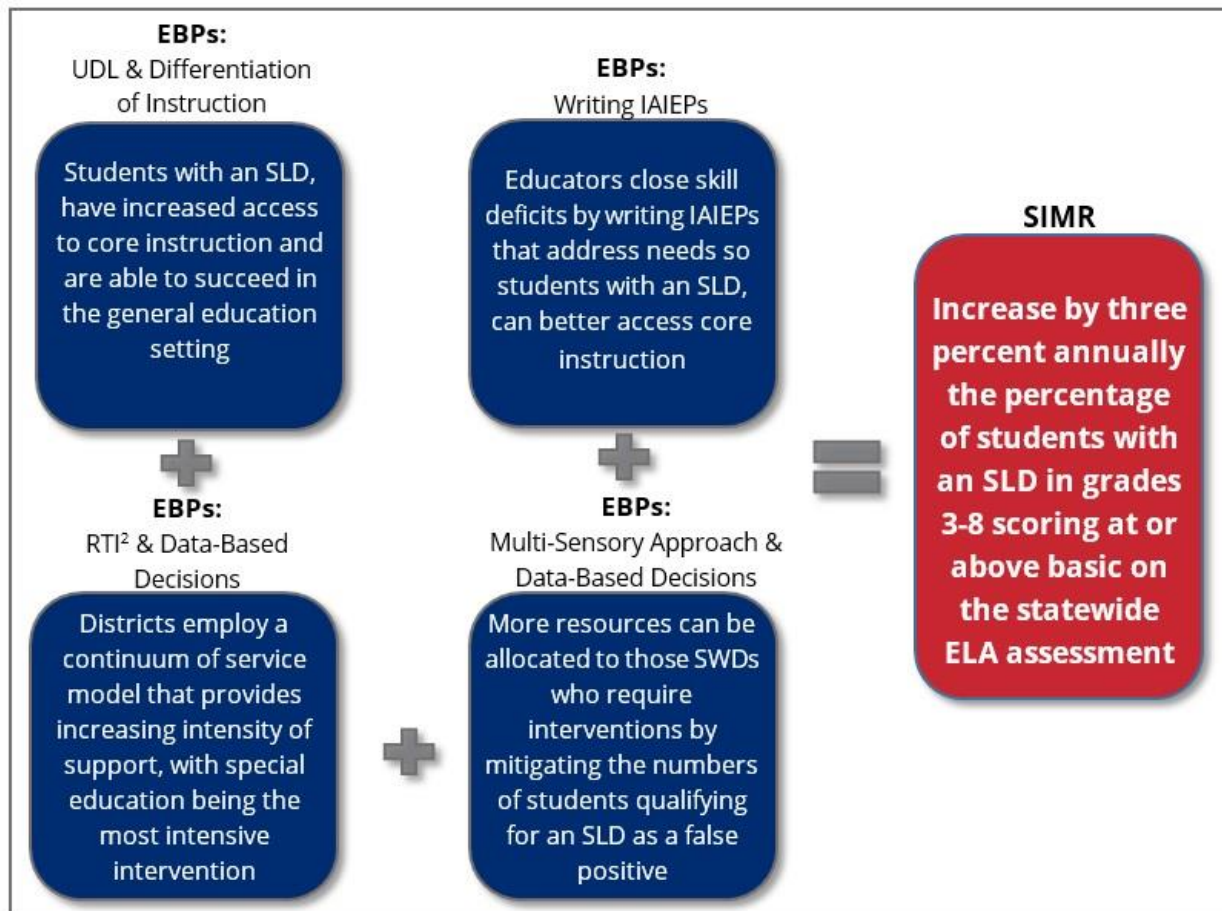


Figure 3.8. The long-term outcomes necessary to achieve the SiMR.

Develop evaluation questions



### ***Step 3: Develop Evaluation Questions***

To ascertain whether the outcomes specified in Step 2 are indeed effective and beneficial to the work in the SSIP, the department, in conjunction with HDI evaluation staff and stakeholder input, has identified a series of evaluation questions to address. The first set of evaluation questions pertain directly to the process of implementing strategies and practices (implementation of SSIP activities). The second set of evaluation questions seek to ascertain whether the strategies and practices indeed yielded the expected outcomes (progress toward the SiMR).

### ***Process Evaluation Questions***

#### ***Access to Core Instruction***

- How many invited district and school level teams participated in training and PD sessions on increasing access to core instruction and using EBPs like UDL and differentiation of instruction?
  - Did all the staff required from the school level team attend the training and PD sessions (principal, special education teacher, and general education teacher)?
  - Did the team members find the training and PD sessions valuable, high-quality, and relevant?
- Are staff who participated in trainings and PD sessions incorporating the skills and principles they learned in their daily practice?
- Are staff incorporating the skills and principles in their practice doing so with fidelity?

#### ***Special Education in a Continuum of Service***

- How many invited district and school level teams participated in training and PD sessions on ensuring special education is the most intensive intervention in a continuum of service model and using EBPs like RTI<sup>2</sup>, multi-sensory approaches, and data-based decision-making?
  - Did the requisite staff attend the training and PD sessions (special education supervisor and special education teacher)?
  - Did the team members find the training and PD sessions valuable, high-quality, and relevant?
- Is special education the most intensive intervention (e.g. provided through a multi-sensory approach)? How is the district making it the most intensive intervention?
- Is data-based decision-making being done through the implementation of RTI<sup>2</sup> and intensification of special education?

#### ***Addressing Skill Deficits***

- How many invited staff attended trainings on writing IAIEPs?
  - Did staff find the training valuable, high-quality, and relevant?
- Are staff who participated in trainings and PD sessions incorporating the skills and principles they learned in their practice?

- Are the IEPs being written in an instructionally appropriate format that addresses skill deficits?

### ***Outcomes Evaluation Questions***

The SiMR serves as the overarching evaluation question which all outcomes evaluation questions work in concert to address. Based on the SiMR, the primary outcome evaluation question is as follows: Is the percentage of students with an SLD in grades 3-8 scoring at or above basic on the statewide ELA assessment increasing by three percent annually? Additional outcomes evaluation questions correlated to the SiMR have been divided out by coherent improvement strategy below.

#### ***Access to Core Instruction***

- What is the change in the percent of students with an SLD in the general education setting 80 percent or more of the day subsequent to the 2015-16 baseline school year?

#### ***Special Education in a Continuum of Service***

- What is the change in the annual percentage of students referred for an SLD subsequent to the baseline 2014-15 school year?

#### ***Addressing Skill Deficits***

- What is the change in skill deficits for those student identified with an SLD for whom IAIEPs have been successfully written (will use sampling of students in participating schools)?

### ***Indicators of Performance***

The evaluators from HDI will assess many of these evaluation questions related to the SPDG-funded activities to examine the effectiveness of implementation of SSIP strategies. They will measure implementation of intervention fidelity using fidelity tools that examine the extent to which EBPs are implemented with high fidelity and implementation of the professional development delivery system, or trainer fidelity. The evaluators will collaborate with the evaluation team members to develop analytic rubrics that will serve as fidelity tools and measure implementation fidelity. Similarly, the Participatory Adult Learning Checklist<sup>60</sup> will be used to ensure the effectiveness of professional development delivery.

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<sup>60</sup> Carl J. Dunst and Carol M. Trivette, "Let's Be PALS: An Evidence-Based Approach to Professional Development," *Infants & Young Children* 22, no. 3 (2009): 164-176.

The evaluators will collect the following data on student outcomes at the district level: the number of students with disabilities in the general education setting and the proportion of SWD in each of the four achievement categories (e.g. number of students scoring below basic/number of students with disabilities). The evaluators will then examine outcome measures based on the amount of professional development teachers received and the fidelity of implementation of the EBPs. This analysis will provide further insight into the contribution of the SSIP activities toward outcomes for SWDs, particularly those with an SLD.

To ensure that all evaluation questions are answered, the department has developed a set of performance measures and metrics for each of them and the data necessary to complete analysis. Table 3.a provides each evaluation question and the relevant measures and data necessary to address each question.

Question Number	Evaluation Question	Indicator of Performance	Data Needed
<b>Process Evaluation Questions</b>			
<b>1</b>	How many district and school level teams participated in training and PD sessions relative to increasing access to core instruction and using EBPs like UDL and differentiation of instruction?	District level and school level teams participated in required sessions on these EBPs	Registration information from each training and PD session
<b>1.a</b>	Did all the staff required from the school level team attend the training and PD sessions (principal, special education teacher, and general education teacher)?	District level and school level teams participated in required sessions on these EBPs	Registration information from each training and PD session
<b>1.b</b>	Did the team members find the training and PD sessions valuable, high-quality, and relevant?	90% reported that they found the sessions valuable, high-quality, and relevant	Participant surveys
<b>2</b>	Are staff who participated in trainings and PD sessions on access to core instruction reporting that these opportunities increased their knowledge of how to support SWDs in core instruction?	80% agree that the training and PD opportunities increased their knowledge in this area	Post-training assessments
<b>3</b>	Are staff who participated in trainings and PD sessions on access to core instruction reporting that these opportunities improved their ability to support SWDs in core instruction?	70% agree that the training and PD opportunities improved their ability to support SWDs in general education classroom	Post-training assessments
<b>4</b>	Are staff who participated in trainings and PD sessions on access to core instruction reporting that these opportunities improved their ability to	70% agree they are implementing learned strategies with fidelity during the spring after beginning implementation	Staff surveys from the spring after implementation

	implement with fidelity the strategies intended to support SWDs in core instruction?		
<b>5</b>	Are staff who participated in trainings and PD sessions on access to core instruction indeed implementing strategies with fidelity?	70% are implementing strategies with fidelity	Fidelity monitoring checklists and observation forms <sup>61</sup>
<b>6</b>	How many district and school level teams participated in training and PD sessions relative to ensuring special education is the most intensive intervention in a continuum of service model and using EBPs like RTI <sup>2</sup> , multi-sensory approaches, and data-based decision-making?	District level and school level teams participated in all required sessions on these EBPs	Registration information from each training and PD session
<b>6.a</b>	Did the requisite staff attend the training and PD sessions (special education supervisor and special education teacher)?	District level and school level teams participated in all required sessions on these EBPs	Registration information from each training and PD session
<b>6.b</b>	Did the team members find the training and PD sessions valuable, high-quality, and relevant?	90% reported that they found the sessions valuable, high-quality, and relevant	Participant surveys
<b>7</b>	Are staff who participated in trainings and PD sessions on special education within a continuum of service model reporting that these opportunities increased their knowledge of how to make special education services the most intensive level of intervention?	80% agree that the training and PD opportunities increased their knowledge in this area	Post-training assessments

<sup>61</sup> Both to be developed through the SPDG. More information on this tool will be shared in Phase III of the SSIP once the tool has been finalized.

<b>8</b>	Are staff who participated in trainings and PD sessions on special education within a continuum of service model reporting that these opportunities improved their ability to make special education services the most intensive level of interventions?	70% agree that the training and PD opportunities improved their ability to make special education the most intensive intervention	Post-training assessments
<b>9</b>	Are staff who participated in trainings and PD sessions on special education within a continuum of service model reporting that these opportunities improved their ability to implement with fidelity the interventions intended to make special education services the most intensive level of interventions?	70% agree they are implementing learned strategies with fidelity during the spring after beginning implementation	Staff surveys from the spring after implementation
<b>10</b>	Are staff who participated in trainings and PD sessions on special education within a continuum of service model indeed implementing interventions with fidelity?	70% are implementing interventions with fidelity	Fidelity monitoring checklists and observation forms
<b>11</b>	How many staff attended trainings relative to writing IAIEPs?	At least one staff member from districts selected to participate in SPDG-funded SSIP trainings attended a training provided on writing IAIEPs	Registration information from trainings
<b>11.a</b>	Did the team members find the training and PD sessions valuable, high-quality, and relevant?	80% reported that they found the sessions valuable, high-quality, and relevant	Participant surveys
<b>12</b>	Are staff who participated in trainings and PD sessions on writing IAIEPs reporting that they (and/or staff they trained) are utilizing the skills and	80% agree they are utilizing these skills	Pre-training surveys and annual surveys subsequent to implementation



	principles learned from their trainings when completing IEPs?		
<b>13</b>	Are staff (and/or the staff they trained) who participated in trainings and PD sessions on writing IAIEPs incorporating the skills and principles with fidelity?	Meet expectations on four of the five focal areas outlined on the IAIEP quality evaluation rubric <sup>62</sup>	File reviews completed by instructional programming team using internally-developed quality evaluation rubric
<b>Outcomes Evaluation Questions<sup>63</sup></b>			
<b>14</b>	What is the change in the percent of students with an SLD in the general education setting 80 percent or more of the day?	<b>Year 1:</b> No regression in the percent of students with an SLD in grades 3-8 in general education 80% or more of the day within participating schools from the baseline 2015-16 school year to the end of the first year of implementation <b>Year 2 and Onward:</b> No regression the percentage of students with an SLD in grades 3-8 in general education 80% or more of the day within participating districts from the baseline 2015-16 school year to the end of the second year of implementation	Environment data pulled for all SWDs and those students with an SLD from the state IEP data management system, EasyIEP
<b>15</b>	What is the change in the annual percentage of students referred for an SLD subsequent to the baseline 2014-15 school year?	There will not be an increase in the percentage of initial referrals for an SLD from the baseline 2014-15 school year to the final year of implementation (five years)	Initial referral data reported by districts at the end of every school year

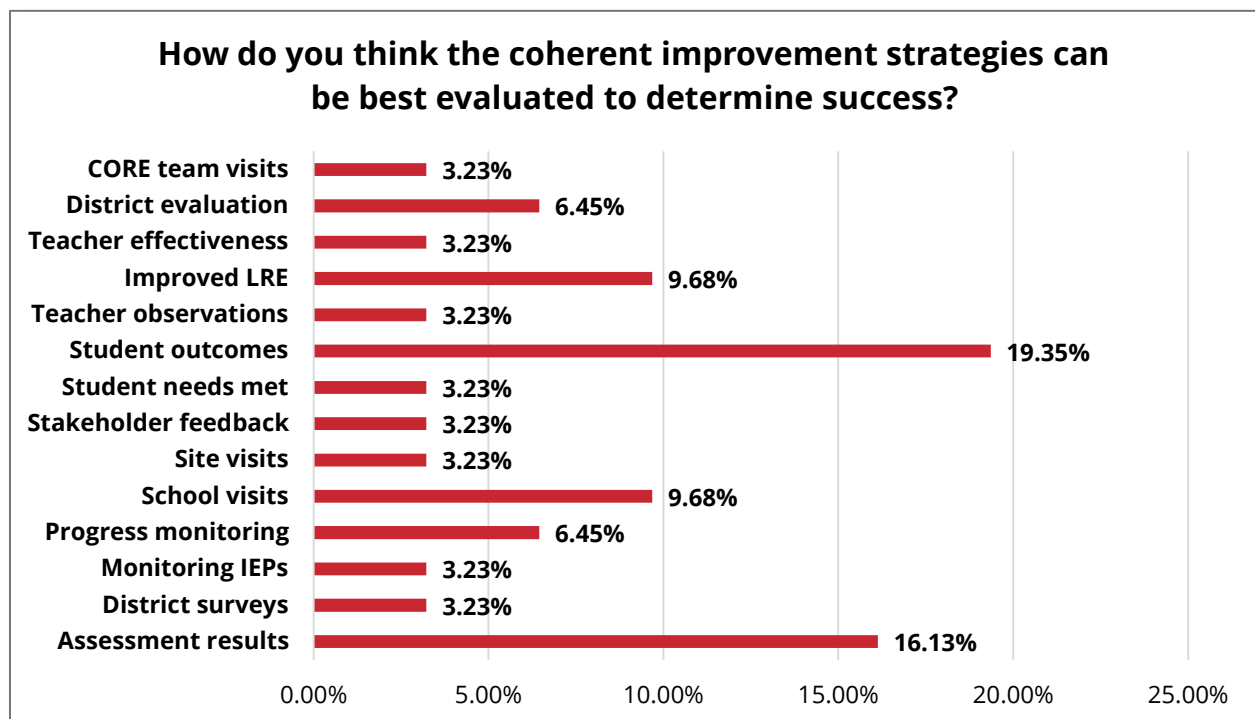
<sup>62</sup> A copy of this rubric, titled "Attachment 14 – IEP Review Rubric," has been attached under the "Phase 2 SSIP" tab in GRADS 360.

<sup>63</sup> These questions are aligned to the evaluation questions set to be used in the SPDG.

16	What is the change in skill deficits for those student identified with an SLD for whom IAIEPs have been successfully written (will use sampling of students in participating schools)?	Decrease the skill deficits denoted in the IEP in place prior to implementation of EBPs and the IEP in place after the first year of implementation (2015-16 school year data). Repeat this analysis through subsequent years to determine that the skill deficits outlined in the current IEP are still less than those in the IEP in place prior to initial implementation	IEP and progress monitoring data
<b>Overarching Evaluation Question - SiMR</b>			
17	Is the percentage of students with an SLD in grades 3-8 scoring at or above basic on the statewide ELA assessment increasing?	Increase by three percent annually the percent of students with an SLD in grades 3-8 scoring at or above basic on the statewide ELA assessment	ELA assessment results for those students with an SLD in schools included in the test cohort of districts and then results statewide in the coming years

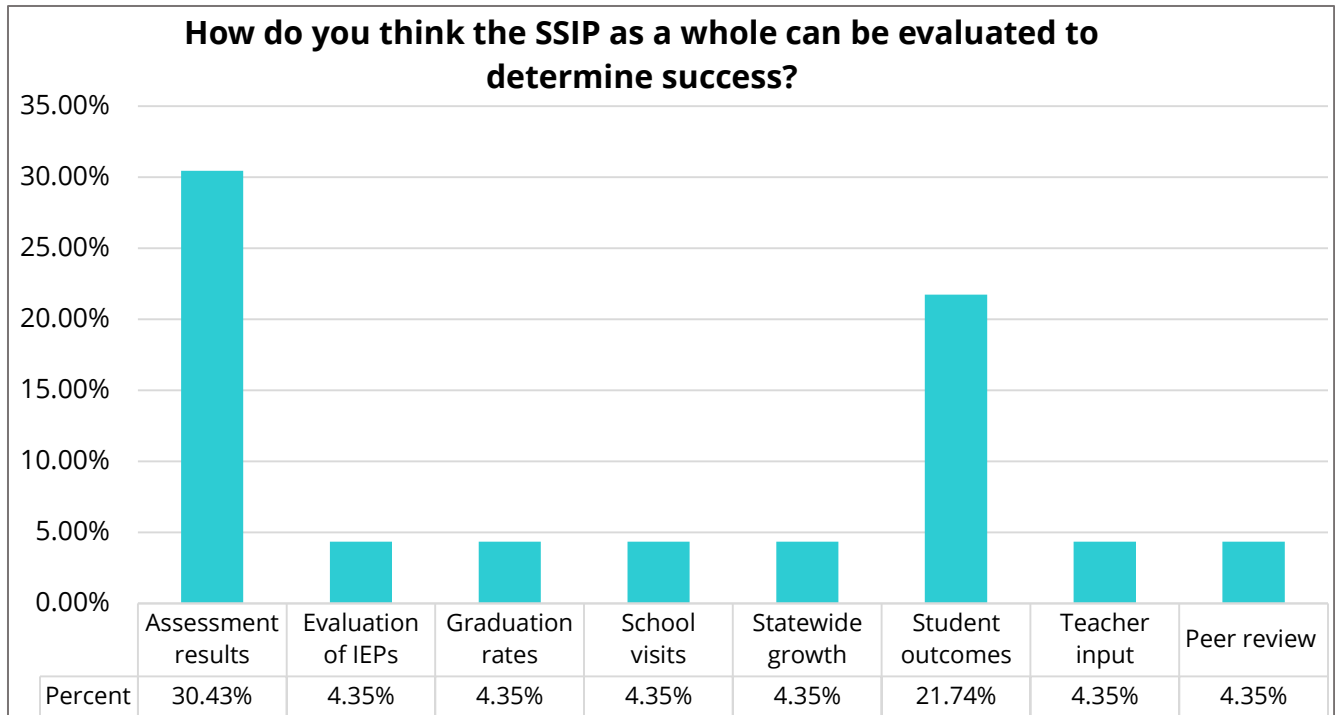
## Stakeholder Feedback

Stakeholders have been consulted by the department throughout Phase I and they have continued to be engaged in the work for Phase II. These stakeholders have included administrators, special education supervisors, teachers, related service providers, advocates, parents of children with disabilities, and individuals with disabilities. When deciding on the SiMR, the department presented information at numerous conferences across the state and to the Governor's Advisory Council to discuss outcome goals of the SSIP and SiMR and how they would be determined. Stakeholders concurred during Phase I that the most effective way to evaluate student performance would be through the use of the statewide assessments. During Phase II, the department once again reached out through presentations and a stakeholder survey to gauge if there were any other evaluation questions they thought might merit consideration. When addressing questions in the stakeholder survey on how to best evaluate coherent improvement strategies, stakeholders responded with the following suggestions:



**Figure 3.9.** Survey responses gathered were grouped into sections based on similarity in answers.

In light of this feedback, many of these metrics will be used to measure the efficacy and import of these coherent improvement strategies and their EBPs. When asked through the stakeholder survey how the SSIP as a whole could best be evaluated, the following responses were provided:



**Figure 3.10.** Survey responses gathered were grouped into sections based on similarity in answers.

Again, these suggestions have been the cornerstone of the evaluation components of the SSIP and the suggested assessment metrics will be utilized in the evaluation process to be completed throughout Phase III.

In one of the final questions on the stakeholder survey, respondents were asked to suggest a research question that would be valuable to include in this component. Many of the suggested questions were aligned with the evaluation questions within the evaluation team at the department. Some of the recurrent questions suggested were:

- Did SWDs receiving special education services in the most intensive tier improve on the statewide assessments?
- What is the tipping point at which inclusion practices and the percentage of time in which SWDs are in the general education setting increase both growth and achievement in reading?
- Why are some districts improving while others are not or are falling further behind? What is being done in the successful and unsuccessful ones?
- What program/intervention is most effective in helping non-readers read?

Many of these questions will be addressed through the evaluation questions outlined above.



Identify evaluation design

#### ***Step 4: Identify Evaluation Design***

The evaluation design for the SSIP will support the evaluation questions outlined in Step 3, Table 3.a. The data that will need to be collected to appropriately complete evaluation of coherent improvement strategies and their EBPs will include: attendance sheets, surveys, teacher observations, document reviews, student-level data from the EasyIEP system, and statewide ELA assessment results. Once these data are gathered, analyzed, and aggregated, the department will be better able to assess whether the improvement strategies and EBPs are being implemented and that the anticipated outcomes are truly realized.

Many of the EBPs being utilized to address the coherent improvement strategies are being provided through SPDG-funded trainings. As detailed in the “District Support” section, these trainings will focus on providing training and PD sessions to districts selected for participation in the activities. Districts will volunteer to participate through an application process, and the application will be used to ascertain whether the districts are indeed structurally able to support this work and have the appropriate support from other leadership within the district. The intent is to have districts participate that are not facing more pervasive problems that might thwart the integrity of the interventions provided.

The districts selected for participation will be the test cohort. The evaluation will be a quasi-experimental design and will look at comparisons of this cohort against itself over periods of time as well as a control comparison group that includes all the schools in the test cohort not initially participating in the SSIP activities and all the districts not participating in the SSIP activities. The department recognizes that it will be unable to control in the comparison groups for the chance that test cohort schools share information about strategies that the comparison groups may then implement. Moreover, other changes to policies or practices could take place and impact the comparison group, creating a potentially imperfect experiment. That being said, this is a challenge all states will face and work through in the coming years of implementation. Tennessee certainly recognizes this concern and will keep it in mind when evaluating the SSIP in Phase III.

Table 3.b below provides further details about the evaluation design to be employed to address evaluation questions for the SSIP. Note that some of the process evaluation questions have been excluded as they do not directly correlate to this design (questions 1, 1.a, 1.b, 6, 6.a, 6.b, 11, and 11.a).

Question Number	Evaluation Question	Comparison Group	Change Over Time
<b>Process Evaluation Questions</b>			
<b>2</b>	Are staff who participated in trainings and PD sessions on access to core instruction reporting that these opportunities increased their knowledge of how to support SWDs in core instruction?	Participants will be their own control	Pre/post-test (survey)
<b>3</b>	Are staff who participated in trainings and PD sessions on access to core instruction reporting that these opportunities improved their ability to support SWDs in core instruction?	Participants will be their own control	Pre/post-test (survey)
<b>4</b>	Are staff who participated in trainings and PD sessions on access to core instruction reporting that these opportunities improved their ability to implement with fidelity the interventions intended to support SWDs in core instruction?	Participants will be their own control	Pre/post-test (survey)
<b>5</b>	Are staff who participated in trainings and PD sessions on access to core instruction indeed implementing interventions with fidelity?	Participants will be their own control	Longitudinal data gathered through fidelity monitoring and observations
<b>7</b>	Are staff who participated in trainings and PD sessions on special education within a continuum of service model reporting that these opportunities increased their knowledge of how to make special education services the most intensive level of intervention?	Participants will be their own control	Pre/post-test (survey)
<b>8</b>	Are staff who participated in trainings and PD sessions on special education within a continuum of service model reporting that these opportunities improved their ability to make special education services the most intensive level of interventions?	Participants will be their own control	Pre/post-test (survey)

9	Are staff who participated in trainings and PD sessions on special education within a continuum of service model reporting that these opportunities improved their ability to implement with fidelity the interventions intended to make special education services the most intensive level of interventions?	Participants will be their own control	Pre/post-test (survey)
10	Are staff who participated in trainings and PD sessions on special education within a continuum of service model indeed implementing interventions with fidelity?	Participants will be their own control	Longitudinal data gathered through fidelity monitoring and observations
12	Are staff who participated in trainings and PD sessions on writing IAIEPs reporting that they (and/or staff they trained) are utilizing the skills and principles learned in their trainings when completing IEPs?	Participants will be their own control	Pre/post-test (survey)
13	Are staff (and/or the staff they trained) who participated in trainings and PD sessions on writing IAIEPs incorporating the skills and principles in their practice with fidelity?	Participants will be their own control	Longitudinal data gathered through file reviews
<b>Outcomes Evaluation Questions</b>			
14	What is the change in the percent of students with an SLD in the general education setting 80 percent or more of the day?	<b>Year 1:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Schools selected for initial implementation by districts included in the test cohort will be their own control in year 1</li> <li>Schools not selected for initial implementation in the test cohort of districts will also be evaluated and serve as the control group</li> </ul> <b>Year 2 and Onward:</b>	<b>Year 1:</b> Pre/post-test data from prior to implementation to the end of the first year of implementation <b>Year 2 and Onward:</b> Pre/post-test data from year to year for each school year



		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Districts will serve as their own control looking at changes from year to year</li> <li>• Once district-wide implementation occurs in the test cohort, districts not in this cohort will serve as the control group</li> </ul>	
15	What is the change in the annual percentage of students referred for an SLD subsequent to the baseline 2014-15 school year?	<p><b>Year 1:</b> Each district in the test cohort will serve as its own control, looking at referral data from the first year of full RTI<sup>2</sup> implementation (2014-15)</p> <p><b>Year 2 and Onward:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Districts will serve as their own control, looking at changes from year to year</li> <li>• Districts not in the test cohort will serve as the control group</li> </ul>	<p><b>Year 1:</b> Pre/post-test data from prior to implementation to the end of the first year of implementation</p> <p><b>Year 2 and Onward:</b> Pre/post-test data from year to year for each school year</p>
16	What is the change in skill deficits for those student identified with an SLD for whom IAIEPs have been successfully written (will use sampling of students in participating schools)?	<p><b>Year 1:</b> Students in identified schools within test districts who are sampled for IEP monitoring prior to implementation will serve as their own control after the end of the first year of implementation (will look at the new IEP in place)</p> <p><b>Year 2 and Onward:</b> Student sampling for monitoring IEPs will expand to additional schools and test cohort of districts</p>	<p><b>Year 1:</b> Pre/post-test data from prior to implementation to the end of the first year of implementation for sampled students in selected schools</p> <p><b>Year 2 and Onward:</b> Pre/post-test data from year to year for each school year in schools and districts implementing strategies</p>

## Overarching Evaluation Question – SiMR

17	Is the percentage of students with an SLD in grades 3-8 taking scoring at or above basic on the statewide ELA assessment increasing?	<p><b>Year 1:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students in classrooms with teachers participating in initial implementation of strategies will be their own control</li> <li>• Students not in classrooms with teachers participating in initial implementation of strategies will be the control group</li> <li>• Schools without teachers participating in initial implementation of strategies will be the control group</li> </ul> <p><b>Year 2 and Onward:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Districts will serve as their own control looking at changes from year to year</li> <li>• Once district-wide implementation has occurred, districts not in the test cohort will serve as the control group</li> </ul>	<p><b>Year 1:</b> Pre/post-test data from prior to implementation to the end of the first year of implementation</p> <p><b>Year 2 and Onward:</b> Pre/post-test data from year to year for each school year</p>
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The control/comparison groups will be crucial to include in this work to truly see if there is a causal relationship between the improvement strategies and their EBPs and the intended student outcomes. Because all the data to be evaluated in the SSIP evaluation plan is collected for all students with disabilities. This will ensure that the data used in comparisons is identical to remove potential mitigating factors or bias. Moreover, it will not be a problem to gather the same information on students and districts who are not in the test cohort.

Identify data  
collection  
strategies



### ***Step 5: Identify Data Collection Strategies***

A conscious effort has been made to ensure that all the data necessary to effectively conduct the evaluation of the SSIP will be available throughout the evaluation process. The department is cognizant of potential pitfalls, such as outlining a series of evaluation questions and designing the evaluation process without having the adequate measures and information in place to address the questions being asked.

Much of the requisite data needed to conduct the evaluation will be gathered through the SSIP activities that have been established in the SPDG's scope of work and project evaluation, while the remaining data are already gathered by the department. This will help alleviate the burden on state staff having to develop new data collection measures or gather information not readily available. It will also abate potential burden on the control or comparison districts not participating in the SSIP activities. The same data that is already submitted to the department will be used during the SSIP evaluation.

While there will need to be additional work done by district staff in the test cohort to effectively implement the coherent improvement strategies, such information is disclosed to staff when completing the application to participate. This additional data collection will come in the form of surveys, observations, and fidelity monitoring. The last item, fidelity monitoring, is incredibly important to the SSIP evaluation and detailed further below.

## ***Measuring Fidelity***

### ***State and Regional Teams***

It is critical that plans are in place to ensure that the EBPs taught in trainings and PD sessions are being implemented with fidelity in the classroom. This fidelity of implementation should occur top down, with the department ensuring that its own staff are providing training to district staff with fidelity. The three SPDG-funded department interventionists, along with

department staff that will include the director of special education eligibility and members of the instructional programming team, will be responsible for developing the content for the trainings and conducting the train-the-trainer events. There will be fidelity monitoring checks in place along with observations to ensure the content is delivered appropriately.

### *School and District Teams*

It is also imperative to evaluate whether those educators receiving training from department staff are being assessed for fidelity of the implementation of strategies in their classrooms. Department personnel, in conjunction with hired interventionists, will create or identify an existing implementation fidelity instrument to measure the progress of participants in implementing the strategies learned through the trainings. The department will provide special education supervisors with training on the use of these instruments in order to sustain these efforts across the large number of anticipated participants. There will also be communities of practice offered for special education supervisors during the second year of implementation in order to build their capacity for monitoring the fidelity of best practices.

The department has identified benchmarks (see Table 3.a) that teachers will be expected to meet after the first, second, and third years of implementation at SPDG partner sites in Gibson Special School District, Metro Nashville Public Schools, and White County Schools. Data from the observations at these sites will be provided to interventionists, the department, district coaches, teachers, and administrators in order to inform needed changes to training and implementation efforts and aggregated data will inform the community of practice meetings. This information will also be communicated to stakeholders through updates and the annual webinar. Table 3.c below outlines additional objectives of the fidelity checks and the tools that will be used to measure the objectives of the trainings. This information is broken out by coherent improvement strategy.

Coherent Improvement Strategy	Objective	Measurement Tool
<b>Increase access to core instruction</b>	90% of trainings will meet fidelity on the training fidelity tool completed by participants	Fidelity monitoring tool <sup>64</sup>
	All district coaches will demonstrate competence to train and support other educators in the implementation of the interventions before being certified as trainers	Observations and fidelity checklists to be completed by department interventionists and other SPDG-funded staff
	For parent trainings on this strategy, 90% of the sessions will meet fidelity on the training fidelity tool completed by participants	Training fidelity tool completed by participants <sup>65</sup>
	80% of special education supervisors will report that the training they received increased their understanding of the fidelity instrument intended to monitor strategies to increase access to core instruction	Post-training surveys
	70% of special education supervisors will report during the spring after beginning implementation that the training they received increased their ability support teachers in the use of the strategies	Staff surveys from the spring after implementation
	70% of monthly communities of practice sessions for special education supervisors will meet fidelity targets	Fidelity monitoring tool completed by participants

<sup>64</sup> To be developed through the SPDG. More information on this tool will be shared in Phase III of the SSIP once the tool has been finalized.

<sup>65</sup> To be developed through the SPDG. More information on this tool will be shared in Phase III of the SSIP once the tool has been finalized.

	70% of special education supervisors during the spring of each year after beginning implementation will report the communities of practice improved their skills to implement the interventions taught during trainings	Staff surveys from the spring after initial implementation
<b>Special education in a continuum of service</b>	90% of trainings will meet fidelity on the training fidelity tool completed by participants	Fidelity monitoring tool
	80% of special education supervisors will report that the training they received increased their understanding of the fidelity instrument intended to monitor the intensity of special education interventions	Post-training surveys
	70% of special education supervisors will report during the spring after beginning implementation that the training they received increased their ability support teachers in the use of the interventions	Staff surveys from the spring after implementation
	70% of monthly communities of practice sessions for special education supervisors will meet fidelity targets	Fidelity monitoring tool completed by participants
	70% of special education supervisors during the spring of each year after beginning implementation will report the communities of practice improved their skills to implement the interventions taught during trainings	Staff surveys from the spring after initial implementation
	80% of special education supervisors feel they have the adequate supports and training to ensure staff are developing IAIEPs	Annual surveys prior to initial implementation
<b>Addressing skill deficits</b>		

### ***Effectiveness of Support***

Assessing the effectiveness of the support being provided to the test cohort of districts is essential for the department to consider in the evaluation component. To be sure, while implementing trainings and strategies with fidelity is important, if the support provided to districts throughout the implementation of the strategies is ineffective, the desired results will likely not be realized. The department will create a process and form to elicit feedback from administrators concerning the challenges to implementation that they are observing. The division of special populations and student support will analyze feedback from administrators and observation data annually to identify barriers and successes and make changes, including revising policies and procedures in order to alleviate barriers and facilitate implementation. This approach will improve sustainability and ensure access to training on an ongoing basis.

### ***Testing the Theory of Action***

The data collected during the evaluation component will be imperative to test whether the theory of action developed in Phase I is coming to fruition. The department anticipates that through the metrics outlined in Tables 3.a, 3.b, and 3.c, that the information gathered will corroborate whether the coherent improvement strategies are indeed working. However, this is said with the caveat that the department cannot control for activities that districts and their schools might pursue (both those in and outside of the test cohort) which could have an effect on student and district outcomes.

### ***Schedule for Data Collection***

While the department was awarded the SPDG fund in August 2015, Tennessee's General Assembly are required to approve use of the funds before they can be released by the federal government. Unfortunately, this approval process has taken considerably longer than anticipated and impeded the intended timeline upon which the department was operating. In light of this, it is difficult for the department to definitively outline a clear schedule on the data collection processes. The collection metrics for each of the evaluation questions have been provided below in Table 3.d,<sup>66</sup> however, the timeframes for most tools will remain unknown

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<sup>66</sup> This table was based on the sample table provided in the resource A Guide to SSIP Evaluation Planning, which can be found at: [https://ideadata.org/files/resources/5697cca3140ba0ca5c8b4599/56996726150ba0d53f8b4592/a\\_guide\\_to\\_ssip\\_evaluation\\_planning/2016/01/15/a\\_guide\\_to\\_ssip\\_evaluation\\_planning.pdf](https://ideadata.org/files/resources/5697cca3140ba0ca5c8b4599/56996726150ba0d53f8b4592/a_guide_to_ssip_evaluation_planning/2016/01/15/a_guide_to_ssip_evaluation_planning.pdf).



until the SPDG funds are released and the three SPDG-funded department interventionists can be hired. The plan will be updated once this information is available.

Question Number	Evaluation Question	Instrument / Protocol	Status of Instrument/Protocol <i>E=exists, UD=under development, TBD=to be developed</i>	Frequency of Collection	First Data Collection
<b>Process Evaluation Questions</b>					
<b>2</b>	Are staff who participated in trainings and PD sessions on access to core instruction reporting that these opportunities increased their knowledge of how to support SWDs in core instruction?	Pre/post-test (survey)	TBD	Annually	After initial implementation of trainings
<b>3</b>	Are staff who participated in trainings and PD sessions on access to core instruction reporting that these opportunities improved their ability to support SWDs in core instruction?	Pre/post-test (survey)	TBD	Annually	After initial implementation of trainings
<b>4</b>	Are staff who participated in trainings and PD sessions on access to core instruction reporting that these opportunities improved their ability to implement with fidelity the interventions intended to support SWDs in core instruction?	Pre/post-test (survey)	TBD	Annually	After initial implementation of trainings

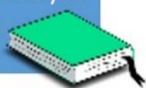
<b>5</b>	Are staff who participated in trainings and PD sessions on access to core instruction indeed implementing interventions with fidelity?	Longitudinal data gathered through fidelity monitoring and observations	TBD	Quarterly	After initial implementation of trainings
<b>7</b>	Are staff who participated in trainings and PD sessions on special education within a continuum of service model reporting that these opportunities increased their knowledge of how to make special education services the most intensive level of intervention?	Pre/post-test (survey)	TBD	3 times/year (fall, winter, and spring)	After initial implementation of trainings
<b>8</b>	Are staff who participated in trainings and PD sessions on special education within a continuum of service model reporting that these opportunities improved their ability to make special education services the most intensive level of intervention?	Pre/post-test (survey)	TBD	3 times/year (fall, winter, and spring)	After initial implementation of trainings
<b>9</b>	Are staff who participated in trainings and PD sessions on special education within a continuum of service model reporting that these opportunities improved their ability to implement with	Pre/post-test (survey)	TBD	3 times/year (fall, winter, and spring)	After initial implementation of trainings

	fidelity the interventions intended to make special education services the most intensive level of intervention?				
<b>10</b>	Are staff who participated in trainings and PD sessions on special education within a continuum of service model indeed implementing interventions with fidelity?	Longitudinal data gathered through fidelity monitoring and observations	TBD	3 times/year (fall, winter, and spring)	After initial implementation of trainings
<b>12</b>	Are staff who participated in trainings and PD sessions on writing IAIEPs reporting that they (and/or staff they trained) are utilizing the skills and principles from the trainings when completing IEPs?	Pre/post-test (survey)	TBD	Initial year of implementation	Survey information from when district staff first attended trainings and survey information prior to implementation
<b>13</b>	Are staff (and/or the staff they trained) who participated in trainings and PD sessions on writing IAIEPs incorporating the skills and principles with fidelity?	Longitudinal data gathered through file reviews	E	Annually	File reviews from prior to trainings and after trainings

Process Evaluation Questions					
14	What is the change in the percent of students with an SLD in the general education setting 80 percent or more of the day?	<b>Year 1:</b> Pre/post-test data from prior to implementation to the end of the first year of implementation <b>Year 2 and Onward:</b> Pre/post-test data from year to year for each school year	E	Annually	Baseline data from prior to implementation of work in year one and at the end of year one
15	What is the change in the annual percentage of students referred for an SLD subsequent to the baseline 2014-15 school year?	<b>Year 1:</b> Pre/post-test data from prior to implementation to the end of the first year of implementation <b>Year 2 and Onward:</b> Pre/post-test data from year to year for each school year	E	Annually	Baseline data from prior to implementation of work in year one and at the end of year one
16	What is the change in skill deficits for those student identified with an SLD for whom IAIEPs have been successfully written (will use sampling of students in participating schools)?	Pre/post-test data from the IEP in place at the start of the school year to the IEP in place at the end of the school	E	Annually	Baseline data from prior to implementation of work in year one and at the end of year one

Overarching Evaluation Question – SiMR					
16	Is the percentage of students with an SLD in grades 3-8 taking scoring at or above basic on the statewide ELA assessment increasing?	<b>Year 1:</b> Pre/post test data from prior to implementation to the end of the first year of implementation <b>Year 2 and Onward:</b> Pre/post test data from year to year for each school year	E	Annually	Assessment data from the 2013-14 school year

Develop  
preliminary analysis  
plan



## ***Step 6: Develop Preliminary Analysis Plan***

The data analysis plans that the department will employ during the evaluation of the SSIP will be fairly straightforward. For the SPDG-funded trainings, the HDI staff who have been contracted to conduct evaluation of the grant will be responsible for developing and reporting the data analysis done relative to these strategies (e.g., survey results, observation results, fidelity assessment results).

Having HDI evaluate a large portion of the trainings and strategies will alleviate the burden on department staff and free up time for more incisive analysis of the data the department will be responsible for gathering. This information will include: the percent of the day in which students with an SLD in grades 3-8 are accessing core instruction; the annual initial referral and eligibility data for all districts in the state; the monitoring of IEPs for quality and instructional appropriateness; and the ELA statewide assessment data for students in grades 3-8. Each of these caches of information will be generated by the director of data services, who will conduct analysis of the data through Microsoft Access and Excel.

The data on the percent of the day SWDs spend in core instruction is available to be pulled at any time. The statewide IEP data management system, EasyIEP, has the ability to pull data on students in live time and thus, there will be no constraints in getting this information. The referral and eligibility reports are required by the state to be submitted annually and are included in the end of year reporting packets that all districts must submit. Therefore, this information will be available every year. Finally, the assessment data will also be readily available annually as required under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and there should be no issues with securing it when needed. The only concern with this data is that the statewide ELA assessment was revised in the 2015-16 school year, which will likely require the department to reset the baseline data used in Phase I of the SSIP.

Comparison groups will naturally fall into place when beginning the evaluation process and initial data analysis. Many of the comparison groups outlined in Table 3.b will be the same groups receiving the intervention, and the department will be looking for change over time. The other control or comparison groups will be those schools in the test cohort of districts that are not participating in the strategies in the first year of implementation and in year two and onward, the control group will be those districts not participating in the activities. The department will ensure that the test cohort of schools and districts and their control groups are as similar as possible in makeup. Because all the data being gathered by the department in the

evaluation phase is collected for all schools and districts, this will make it easy for comparing results.

Develop plan for sharing and using evaluation results



## ***Step 7: Develop Plan for Using and Sharing Analysis Results***

### ***Data Review***

A key part of the evaluation component is the reporting and communication system. The purpose of the reporting system is not only to provide data on the status of the program, but also to offer data on emerging successes and challenges. For the SPDG-funded trainings and strategies, the evaluators of the grant will facilitate monthly conference calls with program partners to discuss the findings from evaluation instruments. Additionally, the HDI evaluators will provide the deliverables listed below to the project leadership staff.

- ***Quarterly Progress Report***

The quarterly progress report will provide an implementation snapshot of the SPDG grant activities. The HDI evaluators will create the implementation snapshot via a triangulation of data from the intervention fidelity tools, professional delivery implementation tools, and practice profiles (all to be developed in the coming months). The implementation snapshots will provide a snapshot of system change and help department level staff to identify areas of coaching and capacity building. The quarterly progress report will also include information on the number and types of professional development activities and survey feedback data from professional development activities conducted during the time period. Finally, the quarterly reports will reference progress toward the project performance measures to provide project staff an idea of how close they are to achieving the annual targets and if modifications need to be made.

- ***Individualized Reports***

In addition to the quarterly progress report, the HDI evaluators will provide specific individualized technical reports to the program staff. For example, the evaluation team will provide a report of the results of the fidelity checks of each teacher to the relevant SPDG-funded interventionist. These reports will indicate if modifications to the plan need to be made. While the quarterly progress reports are meant for the entire project team and will provide a global snapshot, the specific technical reports will provide the evaluation findings for particular SSIP activities.

- ***Biannual Infographic/Abbreviated Report***

A two-page abbreviated report will be provided to the SPDG project leadership to highlight project accomplishments and the impact of the grant on instructional practices. The purpose of the report is to share the evaluation findings with broad stakeholder groups.



- **Annual Report**

The annual report will present the short, intermediate, and long term outcomes of the grant activities. The annual report will also include the program and project measures.

The review of the department collected data detailed in Step 6 will be conducted regularly throughout the life of the SSIP. This information will be shared with evaluation team members, districts participating in the SSIP activities and strategies, and stakeholders (see more in “Sharing Data” section below).

- **Educational Environment Data**

The data on the percent of time SWDs spend in core instruction will be generated by the director of data services quarterly to provide consistent feedback on the placement of students, particularly those with an SLD, based on the strategies being employed by participating districts.

- **Referral Data**

This information will include the number of initial referrals and eligibilities reported annually by every district in the state. This information will be gathered annually by the director of data services and provided in a report to the evaluation team and participants in the SSIP activities and strategies.

- **Instructionally Appropriate IEPs Monitoring Rubric**

Biannually, information will be compiled by the executive director of instructional programming and her team relative to evaluation of IEPs of instructional appropriateness. Staff will be looking at the quality of the IEPs being written and whether the goals align to skill deficits to close gaps.

- **Assessment Data**

This information will be gathered and synthesized by the director of data services annually. It will entail the academic outcomes for students with an SLD in grades 3-8 on the ELA statewide assessment.

## ***Measuring Effectiveness***

The wide breadth of data available to measure progress in the implementation of the coherent improvement strategies will provide members of the evaluation team, participants in the activities, and stakeholders with information to assess effectiveness of the programming. By consistently getting a pulse of student outcomes and results that are intended to be effected by the work outlined in the SSIP, the department will be able to ascertain whether things are working as planned and if modifications need to be made. Table 3.a in Step 3 outlines the anticipated outcomes for the evaluation questions and Table 3.c in Step 5 outlines the anticipated outcomes for fidelity of implementation. Clearly, if the data yielded relative to these questions or objectives are not meeting set targets, the program might not be effective and may need to be changed if the SiMR target is to be achieved. By having such a discrete cadre of

questions that pinpoint exact elements of the SSIP, the evaluation team will be better able to identify what strategies are or are not working, and better yet, why they are or are not.

For example, if the percent of students with an SLD in grades 3-8 in the general education 80 percent or more of the day decreases during the initial year of implementation, the evaluation team might conclude that the strategies and their EBPs were not effective and that the theory of action is flawed. However, supporting information, such as the fidelity checks, might provide additional context as to why the intended outcome – an increase in the percentage of student accessing core instruction – did not come to fruition. Indeed, if the strategies and EBPs were not being implemented with fidelity, that could contribute to the poor performance.

As another example, the percentage of students accessing core instruction might increase after initial implementation of trainings and then decrease throughout the year. Again, one conclusion could be that the strategies and their EBPs are not successful long-term or sustainable. However, this movement might be explained by surveys from district staff that claim there have not been enough supports from the state level team. Having broad sets of data available will help better evaluate the program and control for mitigating factors that might skew data.

The department will be taking all sets of data available into account when measuring effectiveness both to prevent rash conclusions that programs are not working based on an isolated piece of data and to better support contentions that programs may require adjustments or modifications. This will include looking at a spectrum of information ranging from surveys, to observation forms and checklists, to data sets of student results or outcomes.

### ***Making Changes***

Should the participating districts and/or stakeholders determine, based on the data analysis and measurements of effectiveness completed by the evaluation team, that changes are required to the strategies and/or the SSIP, the department will begin the revision process. By using a sample group that is representative of the state in which to conduct the evaluation, it will be easier for the department to readily see change exacted by the implementation of the strategies. If there is no change, or if results diminish, it will also be easier to make modifications with this smaller test cohort of districts prior to more widespread implementation.

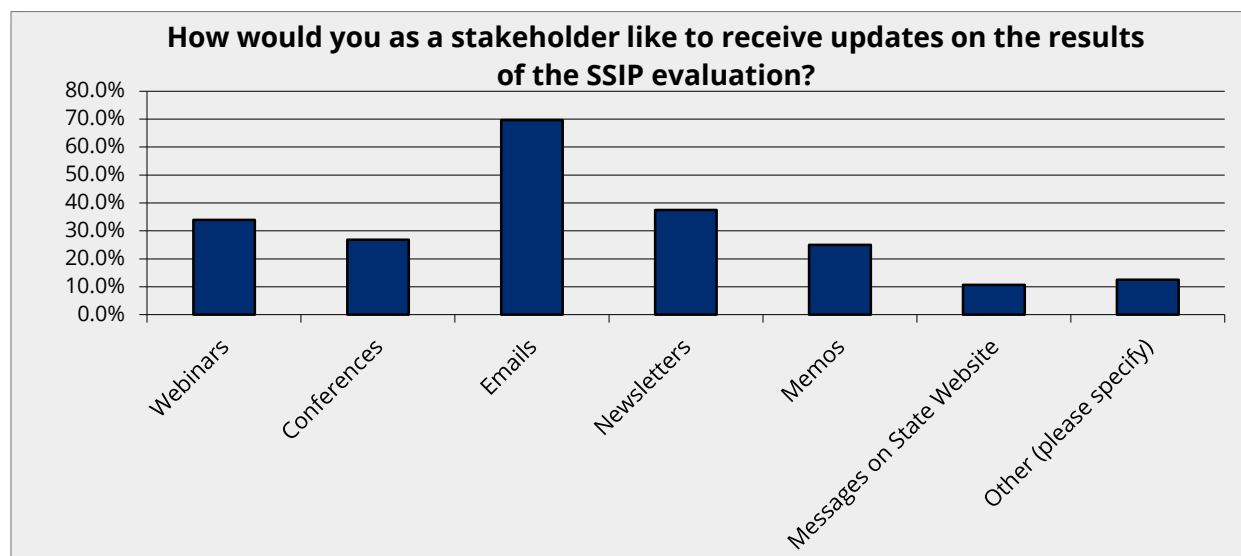
To make changes to the SSIP's coherent improvement strategies and/or EBPs, the department will convene members of the evaluation team, participating districts, and stakeholders to provide rationale for changes and brainstorm potential solutions. These solutions, like the strategies and EBPs before them, will need to be supported by research and must feasibly be supported by the department. Revisions will be made and disseminated for internal department approval prior to release. This will include communicating with divisions across the department and upper-management to provide justifications and rationale for the changes. Once approval has been granted, the department will provide new trainings for participating district staff and modify fidelity monitoring tools, observation tools, and pre/post-tests to reflect any modifications. If additional data will need to be collected, this will also need to be specified in the scope of work to ensure it will be available and practicable to attain. These changes will be documented for the work being done in Phase III to ensure the information reported federally accurately reflects what is being done in the state.

Should changes to the SiMR need to occur, the department will follow the same process detailed for changes to coherent improvement strategies and EBPs. An additional step would be connecting with the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) liaison and technical assistance center staff to discuss modifications.

### ***Sharing Data***

Providing information about the SSIP evaluation will be a crucial portion of the work to be done in Phase III. Indeed, it is vital that this work be shared department-wide and with stakeholders. As detailed in the "Data Review" section, there will be consistent communication amongst evaluation team members and participating districts in the test cohort to successfully implement the SSIP. However, stakeholders will also need to receive this information to learn about the plan's progress.

To determine how stakeholders would like to receive feedback and further communication about the SSIP and the evaluations a poll was provided in the stakeholder survey sent out last fall, with the following responses:



**Figure 3.11.** Survey responses regarding stakeholder communication.

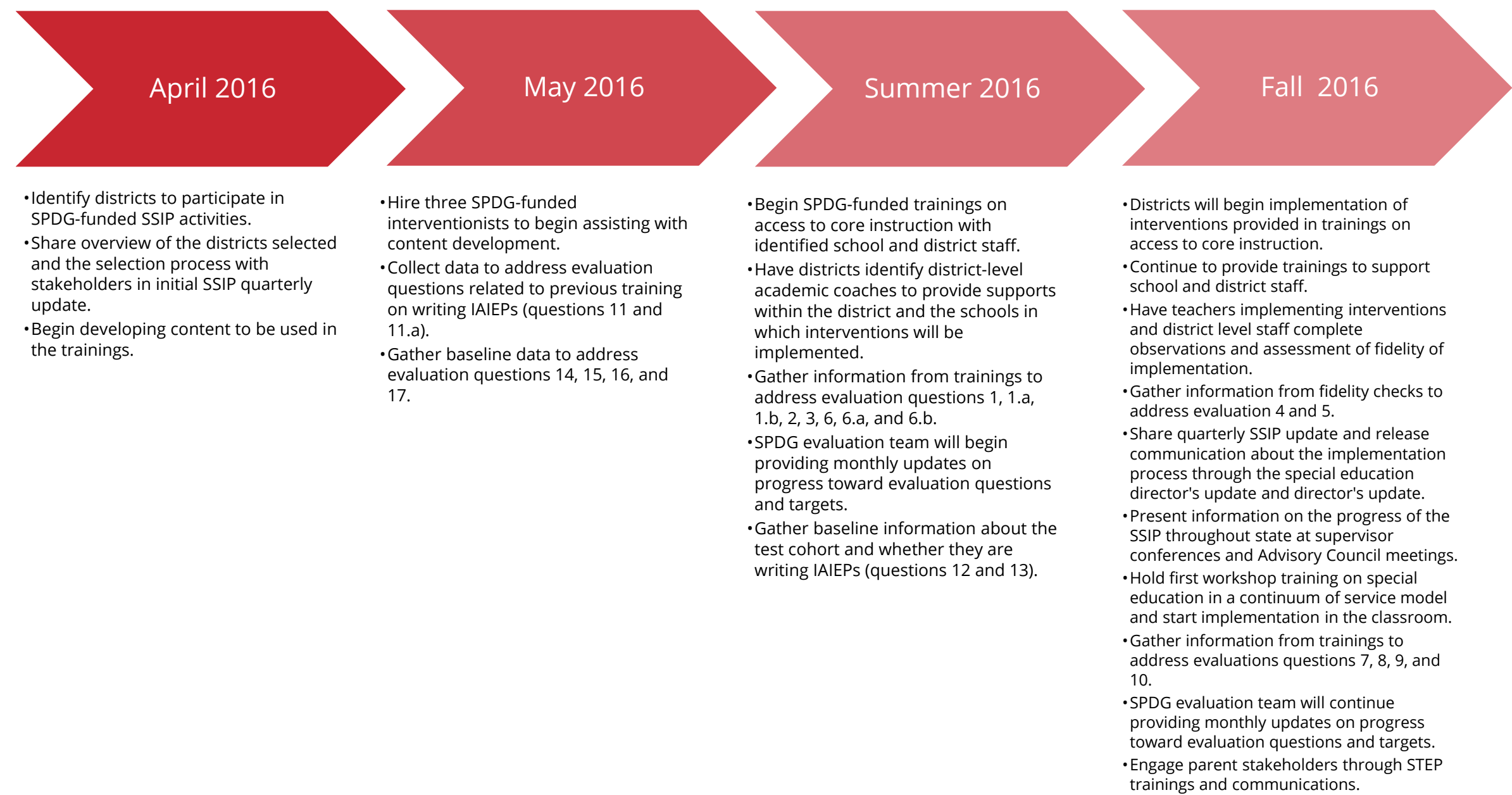
In accordance with the most requested formats, the department will: provide quarterly updates to stakeholders on the SSIP work being done; share out information in conferences across the state; routinely include information on the SSIP in the Special Education Director Updates, the Director Updates, and the EasyIEP Updates; and hold at least one annual webinar for stakeholders to discuss the SSIP and progress toward the SiMR. Feedback will also be solicited from the stakeholders through these communications and annual surveys for any input or insight into the work being done.

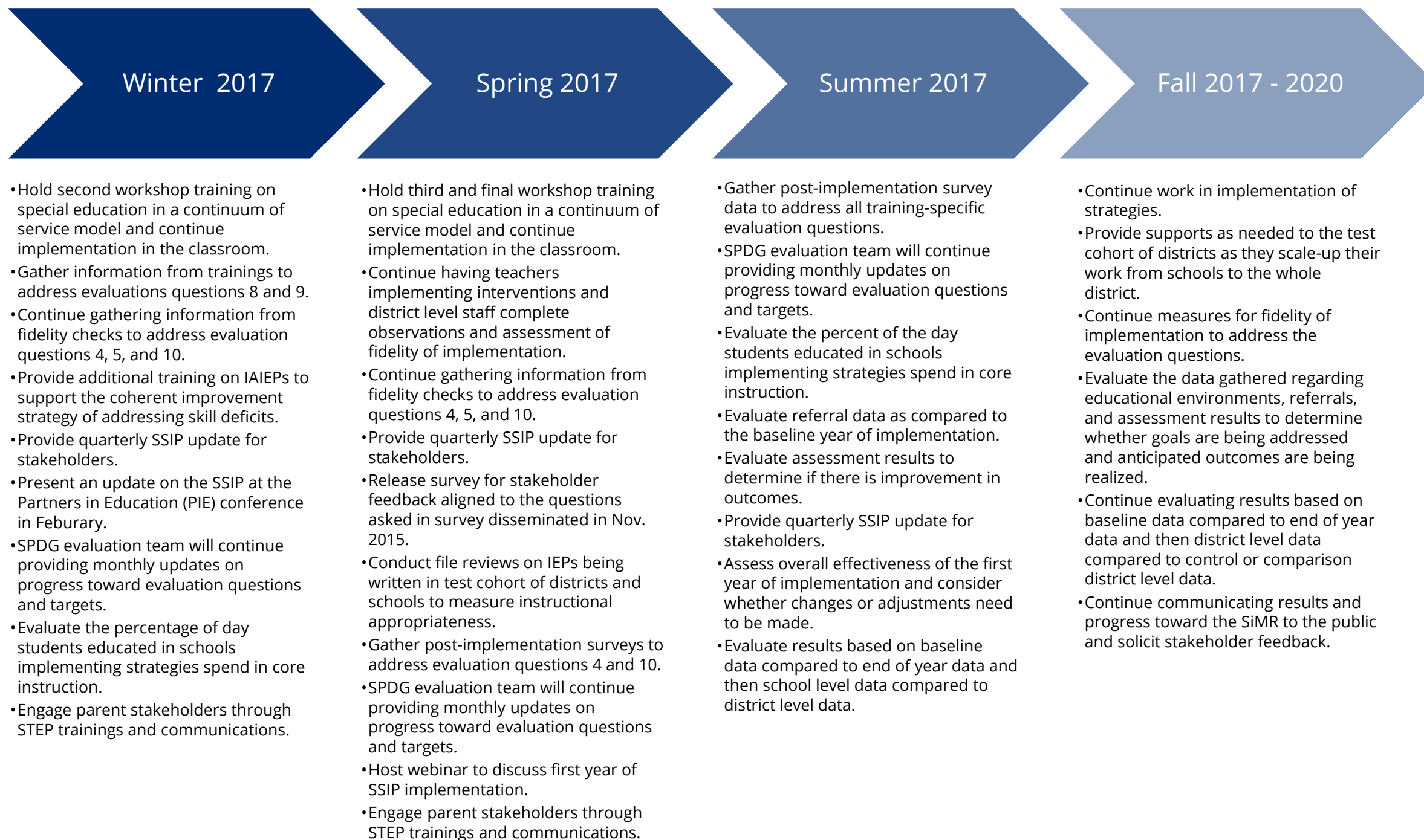
Prepare timeline  
for key evaluation  
activities



### ***Step 8: Develop Timeline for Key Evaluation Activities***

The department has developed a very preliminary timeline to conduct key evaluation activities. Some of the activity timeframes are rather nebulous, as they are contingent upon the release of the SPDG funds. As aforementioned, Tennessee is still waiting for internal government bodies to approve the use of funds. Without these funds, the department cannot begin the work outlined in the SPDG, which is integral to the work being done in the SSIP. In light of this, the timeline plotted below in Figure 3.12 may be subject to change.







## Moving Forward: Phase II

### *Technical Assistance and Support*

As specified in the “Infrastructure Development” component, the department’s current structure is conducive to support the work of the SSIP and align the initiatives and programs being established in the division of special populations and student support with the work being done across all academic divisions across the department. This connection between teams has facilitated larger conversations about SWDs and led to cross-teaming opportunities that will be invaluable during the implementation and evaluation of the SSIP. While the suggestions and guidance from OSEP and technical assistance centers like the IDEA Data Center (IDC) will be instrumental as implementation gets underway, Tennessee is confident the strong connections being forged by across divisions under the chief academic officer will help to ensure the SSIP’s success.

To date, both OSEP and IDC staff have helped with research on the coherent improvement strategies and their EBPs that Tennessee has established as the cornerstone of the SSIP. Continued support in supplying this research and noting any pitfalls or successes derived from the research or other states will be beneficial as the department begins supporting districts with these EBPs. This will alleviate some of the burden on staff currently conducting this research and certify that the department is continuously keeping abreast of research findings and the literature available. Additional information about webinars discussing these EBPs would also be beneficial for OSEP and technical assistance centers share as Phase III commences.

The evaluation component will be handled through SPDG-funded contractors and the director of data services; however, additional perspectives on this evaluation will be imperative. The department would like to have continued support and insight from OSEP and technical support centers like IDC in the evaluation phase. Such input will be advantageous should questions or concerns about the instruments, metrics, or yielded data arise. The unique perspectives both OSEP and technical assistance centers can provide will be vital when analyzing the results of the data gathered through the SSIP activities, as outlined in the “Support for District Implementation of EBPs” and “Evaluation” components. Problems of practice may be addressed through information gleaned from other states, and both OSEP and the technical assistance centers would likely be able to establish these connections between states.

Guidance on scaling-up SSIP activities will also be necessary as the work expands after the first year of implementation. Tennessee recognizes the importance of ensuring the EBPs continue expanding to encourage success for all students across the state, but this can be a daunting and cumbersome task.

Internal questions about how to best scale-up activities, what scaling-up looks like in different districts, and how to maintain successes in smaller samples on a larger scale will likely need to be communicated with both OSEP and technical assistance centers. The acumen that these agencies can provide will allow the department to prepare more successfully for expansion of SSIP activities.

The department has made great strides to solicit stakeholder feedback and encourage engagement. Through presentations across the state in front of audiences ranging from district staff to the state's Advisory Council members, the department has worked to collaboratively develop the SSIP and account for the unique knowledge and vision stakeholders bring. Results from a survey sent to stakeholders in November 2015 were critical in shaping the evaluation questions and how SSIP-related information would be disseminated to the public. In the coming phase of implementation, these stakeholders will be continuously consulted and will receive regular reports on the progress of the SSIP activities. However, the department would also like information from OSEP and technical assistance centers on ways to further engage stakeholders throughout the evaluation phase.

